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A SCHOOL OF COOKERY.

EVERY one now can sing a little, and play a little, and dance a little, and draw a little, but I thought I wanted something more. I was deficient, and I felt my deficiency; or, rather, I was made to feel my deficiency every time I passed a certain well-put board, on which I read that professors in an art unknown to me were always in attendance, that particulars could be obtained immediately, and that lessons could be had from five shillings each. Should I not have a lesson? I asked myself many times. Should I not seek the professor who had waited for me thus patiently, and place myself beneath his care. And at last I did. I went to him, I paid his fee, and, for the period the money lasted, I knelt to him, and was his.

He was not at all a disagreeable professor to belong to. He was young, good-looking, and remarkably clean. This last statement will make known, perhaps, the derogatory fact, that he was an Englishman. It is true. He was not foreign. But he had a tender little French moustache just marking the outline of his yet boyish lip; he had a French-made, French-worn tasselled cap, and the finishing-strokes of his art had been instilled into him in France; so he is entitled to some consideration. Besides, his accent of the *langue Française* was charming. He knew 'Boulong' well, he told me; which was convincing.

I was not the only receptacle into which the young professor's art was to be poured; I had my fellow-pupils—young ladies, who were scrupulously called Miss by the professor, and Ma'am by the underlings, and who were already so aware of the duties required of them that they made their appearance with their gowns tucked up, and their sleeves above their elbows. In addition, they brought with them a towel, a knife, and a spoon. Very good, was my inward comment. I have been to schools before where pupils have been required to bring that much (or something like it) of their cutlery and linen: this is *en règle* entirely. Will said household goods be returned at the end of the period of tuition, I wonder? or be kept, as has

sometimes happened in mean and bygone times, by the oblivious and exacting principal of the establishment?

The apartment in which the lessons thus prepared for were to be given was small, dark, dirty, and at a great heat. It had to be descended into by steep narrow stairs; its light came to it through the shade of area railings; its furniture was of the most unornamental, unsightly description. In short, it must be confessed, it was a kitchen; the truth must be hidden no longer that the professor who presided over it was a cook, that his art was cooking, that his establishment was a school of cookery. His pupils were servants, ambitious to raise themselves in their needful calling, and willing to spend a few guineas now that they might properly ask for a 'rise' in their wages by and by; and I was a worthless drone in the redolent apartment, sadly obstructive to the real workers. They worked—I looked; they flitted nimbly from board to table, from boiling-place to oven, amidst fumes, and hissings, and *allegro* simmer—I sat in my chair fixed, or stood, peering over their busy shoulders at the mysteries the professor was teaching them. A month, I quickly saw—a year, would not have sufficed to initiate me into their adroit manipulations. There were implements there, the very names of which were a wonder to me, and whose uses were as unknown as if they belonged to alchemy.

'There! That sotty-pan! That! There! That!' snapped out Albert, the young professor, in an agony; and I stared in the direction indicated with wide-open eyes. Not even when I discovered that sotty was Albertian for *sauté*, was I an atom nearer elucidation. The generic name of *sauce-pan*—foolish, feeble appellation, one can see now! reducing the vast variety of *cuisinerie* to one subordinate and narrow part!—had hitherto meant for me all kitchen things between an oven and a toasting-fork; how was I to know the implements in which *mets* were concocted, or be aware of the delicate distinction between a pan one inch high, and one two inches or four, or one the intermediate three?

All preparations finished, work seriously began. There was the kitchen—one side of it all stove, with scores of plates heating on a rack above it, and a tin hearth-rug spread the whole width in front—no other material would have been sufficient protection during the furious firing perpetually going on. There was the centre table, one much-used, cruelly-battered, gigantic butcher's block. There were the shelves, holding stores and tasting portions of mace and cayenne, of turmeric and ginger, of curry and garlic, of coriander and catchup. Lastly, there was the professor himself, the French cap before mentioned set jauntily on his head, with a jacket and apron of clean white linen, a fringed dusting-cloth hanging loosely from his girdle, like the dandy ends of a regimental sash, and a scabbard completing his costume, filled with four different-sized knives, sharpened so that they did all execution nimbly, pointed till each end was like a penknife, and the very aspect of them warned of danger.

'Pastry first!' was the rallying-cry, and all eyes were directed to the slab of marble before which the professor stood, and on which he was going to do his magic work.

'Like a book,' said the professor proudly, when the paste he had made had been folded over into a thick block.—'Here, what's-your-name!'—to a working-pupil, whose eyes were not quite where they should have been—'like a book;' and sure enough, there were the layers of flour and butter, flour and butter, as compact and close as they could be.

'Kate! tins; smalls and seconds; corks;' and these things all forthcoming, some pretty fancy-work began. The little tins were filled with pastry, daintily cut and shaped round the edges, and a cork stuck tower-like in each one's centre.

'Bless me!' my unsophistication betrayed me into crying out; 'cork tarts!'

'For baking,' said the professor, deftly going on. 'Taken out after; shape quite good.'

'French pastry!' cried our master next; and he cut some of his nice bibliothecal crust into slices of four inches square, and folded each corner into the middle, bundle fashion; and stamped some others into fancy-edged circles, and with one fold round the still useful corks, and one twist at the narrow end, formed them into such pretty cornucopias as were quite a sight to see.

Then an interruption came. A new pupil arrived; a big, bonnie, good-tempered-looking woman about thirty, ushered into the kitchen by the keeper of the school, and ready on the moment to begin her work.

'What do you want to learn?' asked Mr Albert.

The new-comer, who was of few words, however prepared she might be for action, had no answer ready, and only looked overwhelmedly round.

'Want soups? Seen the bill of fare?'

Two questions were more than the new pupil, in her then state of mental captivity, was able to understand; so she waived the first, and replied to the latter in one short, spongy, puzzled 'No.'

'Read this, then,' said Professor Albert quickly, handing the sheet of paper on which were written the dishes for the day. 'These are soups. Look here.'

The pretty pastry-work was finished, and shot hastily into the oven, before Pupil the Last had read the difficult list down. Then, not venturing on pronunciation, she put her large thumb on a

certain item, and said, in her soft, puzzled way: 'This.'

'Oh, *pottidge aller reins!*' cried the professor, becoming suddenly garrulous in the delight of something definite to do: 'Two carrots, two onions, two turnips, slice them; large blade mace, spoonful pepper-corns, pinch salt, bunch herbs, pint cream; there are the vegs; here's a knife, there's a pan; put veg cuttings through basket. Ask maids anything more!'

More and more swift had become the young teacher's utterance at every word, till at last every brain attending to him must have been in a maze. Pupil the Last's was in that condition certainly; and I watched her increasing blankness, thankful she was to be the operator, and not unlucky I.

'Shall you remember all that?' I asked, in simple pity for her bewilderment.

Her face broke into a smile then, and she shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyes; and then she set about what she could remember of her work as non-comprehending people do, accepting her want of grasp as something beyond her remedy, because she had been accustomed to feel her ignorance, and was not surprised to find she was feeling it now.

'She can ask again,' cried the professor, with a kick of triumph to the oven door at the astonishment his volubility was creating; and then he seized a calf's head with quite a flourish, swept a little place for it on the bechopped table, and laid it down with a sounding slam.

'Calf's head *aller tortoo!*' he cried out, rallying all attention again to himself alone; and he drew his largest knife theatrically, and prepared to give his lesson with his grandest air.

'Calf's head what?' the youngest of the pupils cried; and she was really a pretty coquettish creature, who had already received much of Albert's particular attentions, and could venture to make her ignorance known. 'Calf's head how?'

'*Aller tortoo,*' said Albert airily, without a word of explanation more.

'Come,' I said with a smile, 'don't suppose all of us have been to France as you have, and have learned French. Tell us that *tortue* is turtle, and then we shall all know what you mean.'

'Yes,' explained his Albertship, accepting my proposition graciously; '*tortoo*, turtle; *aller*, like; *aller tortoo*, like turtle.' And his nimble knife commenced some peeling process that was essential, and then, when the knack was noticed, he handed his knife over to the Coquette, that she might have the honour of bringing the labour to an end.

'Not that way, miss,' the Professor cried, after the Coquette had twisted the knife about a turn or two, producing a very different result to his. 'So!'—and he shewed his master-handling a minute again; and then turned sharply to Pupil the Last, who was still operating on her 'vegs'—Albertian for vegetables—though casting an attentive eye on the skill she had paid to come to see.

'That's your way, is it?' were his words to her. 'Ah, this is mine;' and he gave a momentary sharpening to another knife he drew from his scabbard, and chopped away at the half-finished carrot with his hand as rapid as a steam-engine, making the 'veg' slices so thin they might have been pieces of coloured glass.

The pupil smiled and shrugged her shoulders as before; and when the magic whirl was over, went on with her own slow and solid cutting, much as

though the piece of rapidity had never been shewn to her. She was not a vivacious person, and she must do her work in her own slothful, certain way. It was not her fault; since she was a stone, how was it possible that she could swim?

Yet another operation called forth the criticism of the professor. A young miss was exerting herself at a vast pestle and mortar, but the measure of her exertion did not come up to what he expected of her. 'When do you think that'll be done?' he cried, taking the great pestle from her; and it was a vast stem four or five feet long, with a 'poss' at the end as large as a child's head, and the mortar was a gigantic marble thing fixed in a distant corner, on a substantial stand, where the operator pounded, and pommelled, and perspired remote from everybody else. 'Do it like this! Work away! Work as if you hadn't another day to live!'

'Not I!' cried the miss, whilst the professor laboured. 'Times come when we *must* work so, and I'm sure I shan't do it until I'm obliged!'

This made a laugh all round the kitchen, and then it was time for the professor to be back at his *tête de veau*.

'Now, miss,' he cried, with a familiar slap on the shoulder of the Coquette, 'calf's head *aller tortoo*. One carrot, one turnip, one onion, slice; cut out tongue, brains; simmer head second stock; wash head cold water, dry cloth; this way cold water, right hand, there!'

But a fishmonger's boy now invaded the silence of the kitchen with boots that performed a regular clog-hornpipe as he rattled down the steep wooden stair. He was extremely deferential to Professor Albert, and said 'Good-morning, sir,' to him as profoundly as if he had been a potentate. He looked round at all the nice things preparing, gave a sort of appreciative sniff, recited, as he was asked, what he had brought for the professor's use the day before, what his master had for sale in his shop, and what was left in the school's larder; and then the orders for the day being given him, he gave another look round, enjoyed another sniff, clog-hornpiped it up the wooden stairs again, and was gone.

'Cutlet *d'agneau*!' cried the professor without a moment's interval of time; and then, in answer to my look and former application, he condescendingly explained, 'Lamb!'

His movements, again, were of a very lively description. He once more swept a clean place for his joint upon the table, laid it down consciously, drew a knife with the air of a conspirator, and made a telling plunge. His little *pièces* shaped, he laid each upon his small swept area of table, and gave it such a thrashing that it must have been equal punishment to him as well. Down came a wide flat chopper he had with such heavy thwacks, the poor little 'lamb' was battered into twice its surface and half its width, and had to be cut and shaped and scraped once more. Then it was interred in bread-crumbs, triumphantly exhumed, held up by its accommodating bone for all the company to see, and was finally laid in a skeleton-wire saucepan, which was soured in a pan of boiling fat.

'Kate! did you empty meat-dripping, drop of it, into this?' asked Albert sharply of one of his assistants in the kitchen at the back.

Kate, with black eyes, and cheeks and forehead blackened nearly to match, owned to her heavy fault, and looked straight down upon the floor.

'Shouldn't then!' roared the professor. 'Told you so before!'

Kate, with her black eyes having a comic twinkle in them, accepted the verbal castigation hurled at her, and retired to her outer region to go on with her outer work.

Whilst the lamb blistered in its unctuous ocean—troubled as the professorial eyes had peered at it, it looked perfectly pure and clean—Albert looked round for something else to do.

'Ever made barley-sugar, miss?' he said, with another caress of the Coquette's back. Really, he was *very* unfair; he was as partial as any other professor when he has aptness and prettiness to steal away his heart. I wonder the other pupils didn't prick the favourite with a larding-needle, pound her in the mortar, or dress her in their own fashion, unskillfully, *aller tortoo*!

Coquette coquettishly shook her head; she also had few words wherewith to bless herself, or kept them for some more trifling occasion, when instruction was not costing so many pence an hour. Her action, however, was as good as speech, and her friendly instructor prepared to enlarge her mind.

'Weigh sugar one pound,' was his quick command. 'Cold water, half-pint; white egg, juice lemon. Wooden spoon, wooden spoon!—*always* wooden spoon!' for Miss Coquette was handing him the pewter one she had brought herself, and he pulled her up with a jerk, short and sharp.

She was pulled up from her entire operations, a minute after, by a circumstance of quite a different sort. The school being known as a school of cookery, mistresses came there often when they were in want of a cook, and the proprietor walked down-stairs just then to say there was a lady waiting, if any girl were there who would like to go.

A negative came from one girl after another, till the proprietor's eyes lighted on the Coquette. She gave a sharp nod, pulled her gown down from its cleanly tucking, smoothed her apron, and, mutely still, turned to go up-stairs.

'Don't go to say you can't do anything!' Albert called after her encouragingly, shewing his ridiculous partiality by trying to put heart into her when he saw heart was going out. 'You'll do well enough! besides, you can soon learn.'

And learn of *him*, the sly boy was thinking, of course. And to think all this gallantry and affectionate diplomacy was going on in a London kitchen, within four smoke-grimed, bottle-loaded walls that had no grace in them, and could not be made elegant and noble if any one had tried!

But in spite of the grateful smile the Coquette gave, Albert absolutely went on with his barley-sugar!—he did indeed. He weighed, and pounded, and prepared; he spread his marble slab with butter; he put down upon it three sides of the frame of an old slate; he poured his melted materials into this inexpensive receptacle; he rejoiced when he pulled the framework off; and there his mixture lay, cooling, a neat sheet, with clean-cut edges all complete. The artist triumphed then over the fooliah, feeble man, and Coquette was nothing!

'Hannah! scissors!' the professor hurried out; and he cut his compound into strips, twisted them with his skilful fingers, and then the man came back again; for, Coquette coming back as well, he handed her the remaining striples, shewed her the deft touch that twisted them, and gave her some outlying fragments to taste as well.

He never asked her whether she had succeeded in getting the situation, nor did any one, and she never said. She tripped down to us as mute as when she went; she retucked her clean starched dress, she accepted the homage the professor paid her, but never said a word. And I respected this etiquette of the kitchen, and held masculine check upon my tongue, or else I could have played the woman finely, and have implored to have my curiosity appeased. I could have bubbled over with fifty questions without a moment's stop. Was she a kind lady you have seen or a cross one, my dear? Will she allow you to wear that becoming cap? May you have your Sundays out? May you have a follower? Are your wages what you would like? And are your perquisites plenty?

But, attention! to the *entremets* and *entrées*, the *plats*, and *rôts*, and *hors-d'œuvres* Albert is preparing; and never should I have known the result of the Coquette's absence from us if the proprietor of the school had not again made his appearance, his face radiant, his hands rubbing round one another rapidly in token of his triumph.

'Make haste, or you'll be too late!' he cried, pointing up the kitchen window. 'Look! there's your mistress's carriage! Isn't it a beauty! two horses, a footman, and a coachman! There! what a lucky girl you are!'

And every one—one holding a spoon, another a trussing-needle, a third a milk-can, the professor, what he had previously called for as, a 'air-sieve'—every one left his occupation, and looked up at the champing horses, and glittering and well-kept coach and men; and the Coquette smiled, and looked as though she thought herself distinguished; and I knew she was 'engaged,' and could therefore bend my mind entirely to what was going on.

The finishing-stroke, or *coup de grâce*, to some *boudins*, or, to speak Albertly, *boudeens de veau*. All the pestling and mortaring had been preliminary to this; and now, after the veal had been reduced to the consistency of butter, with as much labour spent upon it as would have sufficed to do some mighty deed, it was to be shaped and dressed that it might be ready to be served. One arrangement for this was the soaking of the crumb of a loaf of bread; and I felt quite affectionate towards the homely compound when I saw its familiar face again. Everything else my eyes had lighted on for hours had been so hashed and larded, and braised and grilled, so wrapped up in seasoning and *bouillie*, and *farce* and *meringue*, it was a delight to see something that was neither, and that was innocent of all. Is this fine cooking such a need and boon to man, after all? I reflected. Is the loss of two hours, and the useance of ever so much energy and muscle, *quits* paid for by the production of six spoonfuls of a putty-like mixture that would furnish but a fourth part of the meal of a tolerably hungry man? It might have tasted ravishingly, though. I can say nothing about that. I could not keep putting my middle-finger into the dishes and then sucking it, as professor and pupils did everlastingly; dip they went into a *grenadine*, dip into *meringue*, dip again into *soup bisque de homards*, or *soup à la reine*; but this was beyond me, and therefore *boudins de veau* are to me yet undiscovered country; and until I have explored them, and they have brought me on my knees, I retain my wonder as to their desirability, and do not propose a statue to the artist who found them out.

'There!' cried Albert, after minutes of patting

and sieve-work, and spooning and knifing—'there! Bring those to the boil, and they will do. *Boudeens de veau*. You'll know them again, won't you?'

Thus appealed to, Pupil the Last, as I have called her, broke through the crust of her stolidity and bewilderment. 'I must write it down,' she said placidly and low; 'I shall never remember it.'

'Cooked veal, butter, milk, bread, mace, nutmeg, salt, cayenne,' began the professor—his breath drawn to continue the list for many ingredients more.

But his pupil interrupted him; proud that she had come to something that she *did* know, and so holding up her head. 'I sha'n't forget *those*,' she said. 'I shall remember *them*.' (No wonder, when she had taken her turn at the 'possing' and sieve-rubbing, and butter-beating, and the rest!) 'It's the name!'

I was obliged then to come to her relief. I could not bear to think of her poor brain being so hazy, when I could do anything to make it clear. 'I will write it for you,' I said. 'But I will tell you how you can remember it nicely: it simply means veal-puddings. But never, on any account, call them so! Always give them the French name, or else they will not sound grand!'

I added this because our young professor was indulging in a whimsical grin. He did not wish to bring his dishes down from their high estate; he was thoroughly alive to the importance of foreign nomenclature, and wanted to dazzle with it as long as he could. He *had* dazzled, though; he *had* fluttered his superiority before a handful of women-cooks, so his campaign meant victory; and he was not in the least displeased that I had had renewed occasion to remind him of his spurs. He accepted it as further decoration; and gave me bounteous smiles in informing us it was the time now for the kitchen dinner, that the school would break up for an hour, and that at the end of that period lessons would be resumed.

Out in the wide light streets once more, I was become, through cookery, so cookish, I could spend the sixty minutes given to me in no better way than in turning the leaves over of a cook's book. It was a little, thin, paper-covered thing, bought, second-hand, for three-pence at a book-stall, and it was French; so, if I studied it, I might ascend the ladder a rung or two higher than Master Albert, and come out before him in such grand fashion, I should make him open his bright brown eyes and stare. It was a noble ambition, and it fired me. I plunged into the little volume, and the first thing I lighted on was *grenouilles*! Frogs! I cried to myself, in most lively manner. Of course, frogs in a French cookery-book! Why hadn't I thought of that before? Why hadn't I asked Master Albert how to dress, or, as the French word runs, *accommodate*, a frog? Why hadn't I said to him: 'Do you cut off his paws and his body, leaving only his thighs (ha! ha! how droll!), and do you boil him, and throw him into fresh water, and dry him, and put mushrooms to him, and parsley, and scallion, and garlic, and cloves, and butter, and flour, and white-wine, and salt, and pepper? and then do you add to him a mixture—or *saïson*, as your French *cuisinier* has it—of the yolks of three eggs and a little cream? Because, if you don't, your way is but a twopenny way; and if you do, you might as well leave your frog-thighs out, for small is the taste there would be of them with all those things as a disguise! unless,

indeed, French frogs are of the race of those that tried to swell themselves as large as oxen, and succeeded in doing it!

And then, why hadn't I asked Albert if he could accommodate a *fricassée* of vine-snails? A *hors-d'œuvre* of that appetising little dainty is down in my book, published in 1844; both frogs and snails being classed among fresh-water fish, or, to speak by rule exactly, *animaux aquatiques*. And why hadn't I hinted at hen's milk, *lait de poule*, which my *Cuisinière Bourgeoise* says is made of the yolks of eggs, and sugar and hot water, and is good, taken on going to bed, for persons with a cold? I could have been learned, also, about a dish of calf's marrow, called *amourette* because it is such a little love; I could have talked of a *purée* of dried pease for fast-days, of the *pâte* for *pains bénits*—consecrated bread—and of *une idée de sel*, and a *bouquet de fines herbes*—the two last sounding so airy and delicious, one feels, indeed, that cookery is an art, and that there is wisdom in calling its practisers professors.

Well, why not come out with all this knowledge, now my hour was over, and I was going back? Why not hurl my thunder, now it was prepared, and make Albert and his tiny Hall of Cookery tremble with the roar? But no; this would not be fair; so, though I laughed several good hearty laughs 'in my sleeve,' I determined to let no smiles or acquisitions get beyond that confined *dépôt* when I presented myself at the little kitchen, and was beginning my novel studies again.

I was a little too early when I did this. I had arrived at the bottom step of the steep stair before I was aware of it (and they are unfavourable circumstances those of one's toes being introduced anywhere before one's head), or I would have shewn good generalship, and beaten a retreat. What I could not do gracefully, however, I would not do at all; and where five-sixths of me already were, I let the rest go, and trod boldly on. The kitchen was a different kitchen to the one I had left fifty-nine minutes and three-quarters before. Albert, and the Kate and Hannah who assisted him, were quietly seated, all reading newspapers (Hannah's was a thrilling journal, though), and I pored unnoticed over the school-rules nailed against the wall, peeped into many pots and pans that were still unknown to me, and ruminated on what I had learned and seen, to make the best of them I could. But soon the Coquette came tripping prettily to us, the Heavy Pupil followed her, and by the minute or two it took for the others to assemble, the fire-arrangements were completed, and everything was ready once more to begin.

'What will you have?' asked Albert briskly. 'What will you do first? *Meringue*, for decorating *tourtes*.' And we were round him as attentively as if he had been an oracle.

'*Tourtes*!' said the Last Pupil, rolling the word heavily over and over on her tongue—'*tourtes*!'

'Call 'em tarts, if you like,' said the professor impatiently. He would have got out of the explanation if he could, but he knew I was there to check him; and if he could only have known the battery I could have brought to bear upon him! But he didn't, so it doesn't matter. 'Some people say *tourtes*, some tarts; I like *tourtes* best myself.' And then he reverted to the *meringue*, and rattled out the list of ingredients to make it; quite sorry, I am sure, it was not twice as lengthy, and couldn't be complicated into a great deal more.

Then, when one pupil was whisking eggs for this, and another was pounding sugar, the professorial mind became intent on the calf's head à la *tortue*, and Albert, taking something from some frying fat like two large stones picked up from gravel, spoke suddenly to the Coquette in words that filled me with surprise. 'Here's your brains, miss!' was his startling exclamation.

And I gave quite a bounce. 'Good gracious!' I cried—'are they indeed?'

And whilst I looked piercingly at the two brown things lying flat on the professor's hand, the kitchen burst into a roar.

'How sharp you are!' said the professor.

So I let him and the others think so, and the work went on.

Just the applying of the *meringue*. That was the thing that brought the day's tuition to a conclusion; and very adroit, pretty work it was. The Coquette had whisked the egg-whites into a cloud-like froth; Albert thickened it with the sugar, twisted some pure-white paper into an impromptu funnel, and poured the mixture into it, from which its only exit was through the pointed end. He had previously made a twin-funnel to contain jam, and had filled the little tart-cavities from which had been drawn the corks; and now, with his squirt of *meringue*, he further embellished the little dainties with spots, and trails, and winding-stairs of liquid snow, which exuded itself at his sovereign will and pleasure, with merely the tender pressure of his broad and skilful thumb. True to the predilection I had noticed at almost the first words he uttered, he handed over the finishing of these fairy structures to the Coquette; and then, when they were all done, and sugar had been sifted over them, we all took our leave.

Cookery was over, as far as I was concerned, and I was heartily glad; and Albert—my rival in mastery of a foreign tongue, my fellow-servant-maid enlightener—how was he? Not released yet, nor nearly. Not even for that day was there yet rest for him. As my head was up-stairs, and my legs were yet necessarily lingering down below, I heard a man-servant, who had a moment before passed me, say he 'wanted' a particular clear butter-sauce; and looking down, I saw Albert reaching out a pan, and I knew this supplementary pupil meant a short spell of cooking and cooking's atmosphere for him still. And I knew, even, what special part of his odoriferous occupation would be demanded of him the next day; for, as I stayed a moment to bid good-afternoon to my fellow-pupils, one of them was saying to another: 'I must have ice-pudding to-morrow, or my mistress will go crazed!'

For my part, I was so surfeited with cookery, I cried: Something raw, if you please, for me! Something that has never been touched by hand, except the one that pulled it off the blooming tree, or uprooted it from the honest ground! Let me be a Timon, if you will, and gnaw radishes and cabbage; or a Beau Brummell, associated with the consumption of a green-pea; but no *ragoût*, *côtelette*, *compote*, *crème*, or any hint of cooking, till the remembrance of all that I have seen is faded, and the very smell of it has passed away!

And one more word before I lay down my pen; or let it be given in the way of a royal notice or proclamation: Whereas many English persons having been heard to say, with much contempt of

their own dear country, and more contempt of their own dear country's maids, that French cooks are the only cooks worth mentioning, because they can make dishes, good for the digestion and savoury to the palate, out of nothing; judgment is hereby given, that all such persons shall yield up such belief immediately, on pain of being thought ignorant and absurd. French cooks may use a small quantity only, possibly, of the thing the dish they make is called by, as in the case of frog fricassée, for instance; but if the articles the frogs are to be dressed with are nothing, and would amount to nothing when bought and paid for, then will I bind myself to Professor Albert for a regular apprenticeship, and be a slave to cooks and cookery for ever.

There was a good story current once of a man entreating the use of a pan and fire to make stone-broth, and cunningly getting into it afterwards—one by one, and by separate solicitation—all the ingredients with which other folk make broth of less illusory pretensions; and I think that, between the nothingness of the things the poor man declared he wanted, and the nothingness of the things other people have declared French cooks wanted, there is vastly little difference.

And if by nothing else, I am that much the wiser for my visit to the School of Cookery.

ROYAL CHRISTMASES.

EVER since England became a Christian land, her kings, whether Saxons, Danes, or Normans, delighted in holding stately revelry at Christmas. Alfred the Great decreed that the festival should extend from Christmas-eve to Twelfth-tide; and it was his persistence in honouring the season under any circumstances that brought about his defeat by Guthrum, and consequent concealment and awful failure in domestic service. Canute marked one of his royal Christmases by a piece of sudden retributive justice: bored beyond all endurance by the Saxon Edric's iteration of the traitorous services he had rendered him, the king exclaimed to Eric, Earl of Northumberland: 'Then let him receive his deserts, that he may not betray us as he betrayed Ethelred and Edmund!' upon which the ready Norwegian disposed of all fear on that score, by cutting down the boaster with his axe, and throwing his body into the Thames.

The Conqueror celebrated his first English Christmas by a blood-stained coronation in the new abbey at Westminster; following up this inauspicious inauguration of his reign by hurrying down to Winchester, to seize the abbey there and all its belongings, in revenge for the overactive support the Abbot of St Grimbold had, naturally enough, given to his nephew Harold; an offence sufficiently expiated by the death of that churchman and his dozen militant monks on the field of Hastings. Three years afterwards, William kept his Christmas in a still more ruthless fashion, by devastating all the country between York and Durham, destroying everything upon which man or beast could live, and razing every habitation for the space of threescore miles, wreaking vengeance upon 'the goodly cities, with their towers and

steeple, and the beautiful fields and pastures watered by sweet and pleasant rivers,' until they became utterly desolate, and corpses rotted in the silent streets and deserted highways, for lack of friendly hands to give them burial; no less than a hundred thousand people perishing by fire and sword, cold and hunger, in that cruel Christmastide. Of a more seasonable character was William's Gloucester Christmas in 1085, when he assembled together the chief clergy, nobles, knights, and thanes of the realm to see his three chaplains invested with the bishoprics of London, Chester, and Thetford. He set the custom, long followed by his successors, of wearing the crown publicly three times a year—at Easter, Whitsuntide, and Christmas, when the great men of the land were invited to court, and duly feasted at Westminster, Winchester, or Gloucester. The last-named place was usually the scene of the Christmas festivities, until Rufus took a fancy for Windsor, when the honour was divided.

Henry I. affected Westminster, keeping his Christmas there for the first four years of his reign, after which he gave Windsor a turn, but made the benefit a doubtful one by raising heavy tributes upon the occasion. In 1127, he invited the king of Scots to Windsor, but the royal Christmas was sadly marred by a most unseemly row between the two primates. Thurlstan, Archbishop of York, encroaching upon the privileges of his brother of Canterbury, insisted upon placing the crown upon the king's head ere he set out for church. This the partisans of Canterbury would not allow, settling the matter by turning Thurlstan's chaplain and followers out of doors, and thereby causing such strife between the heads of the church, that they both set off to Rome, to lay their grievances before the pope.

Doughty Stephen, who was rarely worth more than half-a-crown, celebrated his first royal Christmas when he was crowned in London; but it was a weary time before he had a chance of keeping a second. He had quite enough to do to defend his crown without wasting money upon exhibiting it; but when, towards the end of his stormy reign, he compromised matters with his rival, he boldly wore his crown at Lincoln in defiance of the popular belief, that any king entering that satanic-watched city would come to sudden grief. His successor kept his first Christmas at Bermondey with great solemnity, marking the occasion by passing his royal word to expel all foreigners from the kingdom, whereupon William of Ypres and his Flemings decamped without waiting for further notice. In 1158, Henry, celebrating the festival at Worcester, took the crown from his head, and placed it upon the altar, after which he never wore it. But he did not cease to keep Christmas. In 1171, he went to Ireland, where the chiefs of the land displayed a wonderful alacrity in taking the oath of allegiance, and were rewarded by being entertained in a style that astonished them. Finding no place in Dublin large enough to contain his own followers, much less his guests, Henry had a house built in Irish fashion of twigs and wattles in the village of Hogges, and there held high revelry during Christmastide, teaching his new subjects to eat cranes' flesh, and take their part in masques, mummeries, and tournaments.

Crusading expeditions kept Cœur-de-Lion from enjoying his Christmas in his own land; but when he was in Sicily in 1190, he feasted every gentleman in the French and English armies in right regal style, letting none depart from the banquet-table without a present worthy of the giver. John, fond of display and good living, often lost precious time in Christmas revelling, when he should have been busy with sterner work. When he kept Christmas at Guildford in 1201, he taxed his purse and ingenuity in providing all his servants with costly apparel, and was chagrined beyond measure because the Archbishop of Canterbury, in a similar fit of sumptuary extravagance, sought to outdo his sovereign. John, with his usual craft, concealed his displeasure at the time, but punished the prelate by celebrating the next Easter feast at Canterbury at his expense, and we may be sure he did not shew any mercy to the archbishop's purse. Continually quarrelling with his nobles as John was, it is not surprising that their attendance at his Christmas-feast grew less and less every year, until he could only collect a meagre company around his board; and it was said that he had as many enemies as there were nobles and great men in the land. Henry III.'s royal Christmases did him more harm than good. In 1234, the nobles refused his invitation, on the plea that he shewed too much favour to foreigners; and again, in 1241, although they appeared at Westminster, it was only to leave in high dudgeon at the place of honour at the banquet being occupied by the papal legate, then about to leave England, 'to the sorrow of no man but the king.' In 1252, Henry solemnised the marriage of his beautiful daughter Margaret with Alexander, king of Scots, and held his Christmas at the same time. The city of York was chosen as the scene of the regal festivities; the marriage took place upon Christmas-day, the bridegroom and a score of his nobles receiving knighthood at the hands of the English king when the royal pair were made fast. Henry seems to have conciliated his own nobility for a time, for all the peers of the realm attended at court, and he counted a thousand knights in his train; while Alexander brought sixty splendidly attired Scottish knights with him. That the banqueting was on no mean scale, may be opined from the fact, that six hundred fat oxen were slaughtered for the occasion, the gift of the Archbishop of York, who also subscribed four thousand marks (£2700) towards the expenses. The consumption of eatables and drinkables at such feasts was enormous. An order of Henry's, addressed to his keeper of wines, directs him to deliver two tuns of white and one of red wine, to make garbafiac and claret, 'as usual,' for the king at Christmas; and upon another occasion, the sheriffs of Gloucestershire and Sussex were called upon to supply part of the necessary provisions; the first named being directed to get twenty salmon, and make pies of them; while the latter was instructed to send ten peacocks, ten brawns with their heads, and other provisions.

Henry, while he feasted the rich, did not forget the poor; for when he kept his Christmas at Winchester in 1248, he ordered his treasurer to fill Westminster Hall with poor people, and feast them there for a week. Twenty years afterwards, he made his royal Christmas the means of bleeding the Londoners, who had offended him by buying his plate and jewellery, when

the emptiness of his exchequer compelled him to raise funds that way. Probably the citizens had refused to lend him money on the score of poverty. His revenge was a curious one. He kept his Christmas in London for fifteen days, opening a fair meantime at Westminster, and forbidding any shop to be opened in London as long as the festival lasted, while he helped himself to all the wine and victuals he could lay hands upon to furnish forth the royal tables; nor would he listen to the remonstrances of the citizens, until they agreed to make him a present of two thousand pounds, upon the receipt of which he withdrew his prohibition against carrying on business within the city.

Edward I. kept Christmas at sundry places not usually so honoured—namely, Bury, Cottingham, Ipswich, Bristol, Eadingham, Berwick, Carlisle, and Lincoln. In 1286, Oxford was thus favoured, but the favour was accompanied by an unpleasant episode in the hanging of the mayor, by the king's command. Llewellyn of Wales and Baliol of Scotland were at different times partakers of Edward's Christmas hospitality. York saw the unlucky Second Edward keep Christmas in 1311 with great jollity, rejoicing in the presence of Piers Gaveston and his outlandish men, while the queen and court took their pleasure sadly on that account. In 1324 and 1325, the royal Christmas was spent very nobly and royally at Nottingham; but the following year found Edward a prisoner at Kenilworth, with none to do him reverence; while his triumphant wife and son celebrated the winter-feast with great joy at Wallingford, preparatory to depriving their captive of his crown.

Wells and Guildford were the scenes of strange and sumptuous shows when Edward III. kept his Christmas at those towns in 1331 and 1348, and the royal purse-strings had to be unloosed to some extent to pay for the proper ties provided; figuring among the items being tunics of divers coloured buckram, visors of different likenesses, dragons' heads, peacocks' heads, swans' heads, and tunics bespangled with gold and silver stars, or decorated with peacocks' eyes. In 1358, Edward had two crowned guests at his Westminster Christmas-feast; but these were there from no choice of their own, victims to the fortune of war at Poitiers and Neville's Cross. This great king's last Christmas was kept at the same place, being signalled by all the nobles of the realm attending to swear fealty to the son of the Black Prince, who, by the king's desire, took precedence of his uncles at the banquet, as befitting the heir-apparent to the crown.

When Richard came to give Christmas-feasts himself, he outdid all his predecessors in prodigal hospitality, although he sometimes kept but sorry holiday; as when, cooped up in the Tower, he looked out on the encampment of 'The Lords' army, forty thousand strong, fresh from their victory over his friends at Radcot Bridge. Richard had a foolish knack of making enemies upon these occasions; one year giving great offence by allowing the Earl of Suffolk to appear in royal robes; and in another, snubbing John of Gaunt when he came to pay his respects to him, and sending him off to Kate Swinford for solace and consolation. When he kept Christmas at Lichfield, he was obliged to enlarge the episcopal palace, in order to make room for his guests, who managed between

them to put away two thousand oxen and two hundred tuns of wine ere they finished their revelling. At the last Christmas he was fated to hold, the extravagant monarch appeared in a robe of cloth of gold, so covered with precious stones, that he thought it necessary to employ two hundred Cheshire men to guard him and his coat. Upon this occasion, the court was attended by thirteen bishops, with barons, knights, and esquires in proportionate numbers; and ten thousand people dined daily at the expense of the king—so soon to die from starvation.

A conspiracy to murder Henry IV. came near making his first Christmas his last; and the first feast held by Henry V. was marked in the same manner, giving him an opportunity for displaying his energy, by hastening up to London, surprising the rebels at a midnight meeting, and making short work of them. The hero of Agincourt did not allow the holiday season to interfere with his military operations; but he did suspend proceedings against Rouen upon Christmas-day, supplying his hungry foes with meat and drink for that day only. Later on, he held a proud Christmas at Paris, when the French nobility flocked from all parts to do homage to their conqueror. Henry of Windsor, buffeted about between palace and prison, kept Christmas as best he could, and little of his doings this way is chronicled, save that he paid one Travail and his companions four pounds for performing plays and interludes. The annalists even omit to mention the Christmas he kept at Bury in 1433, when the king was met upon Newmarket Heath by the aldermen and five hundred townsmen, who shewed him and his mile-long train the way to the monastery of St Edmund, where the Lord Abbot and the Bishop of Norwich waited to receive and entertain them with a liberality worthy of the church.

Brisk in the ball-room as he was brave in battle, Edward IV. did not let Christmas pass unnoticed, but celebrated the feast with every pomp he could devise. The handsomest man of his time delighted in setting new fashions upon these occasions; and the chronicler of Croyland Abbey unctuously dilates upon the variety of costly garments he assumed; although the good monk only expresses disgust when recording similar vanities displayed by Richard III. If Westminster Hall could speak, it would testify that Henry VII. was no niggard in keeping up the old custom; wearing his crown, feasting the eyes of his guests with curious pageants, and loading the banquet-table with peacocks, swans, herons, conger, sturgeon, dog-fish, brawn, and such-like delicacies. Nor was wassail forgotten, but treated with all due honour, being brought into the Hall with great ceremony. First, the royal sewers entered with dainty dishes to set before the king and queen, followed by the royal carvers; next came the ushers of the chamber bearing piles of cups, and the butlers carrying wine wherewith to fill them; and then, after a fitting pause, entered the treasurer, comptroller, and steward, the last named bearing the precious bowl, at sight of which the gentlemen of the chapel-royal cleared their throats, preparatory to answering the steward's cry of 'Wassail, wassail, wassail!' with a good wassail song.

Greenwich and Richmond were the favourite Christmas resorts of Henry VIII., who himself took a conspicuous part in the tiltings, mummeries, and disguisings for which he had such a fancy. Fan-

tastic enough these disguisings were. That of 1510 is described as 'a pageant devised like a mountain, glistening by night as though it had been all of gold and set with stones; on the top of which mountain was a tree of gold, the branches and boughs frised with gold, spreading on every side over the mountain with roses and pomegranates. Which mountain was with vices brought before the king, and out of it came a lady apparelled in cloth of gold, and the children of honour called the henchmen, which were freshly disguised, and danced a morice before the king; and that done, re-entered the mountain, which was then drawn back, and then was the wassail and banquet brought in, and so brake up Christmas.' In 1513, the disguising took the shape of a Castle Dangerous, with towers, gates, dungeons, and defences all complete, garrisoned by six ladies, clad in russet satin, overlaid with golden leaves, and wearing coifs and caps of gold. This castle was assaulted by half-a-dozen gentlemen (of whom Henry was one), dressed in motley coats of cloth of gold and russet satin, who soon forced the garrison to capitulate, and come down and dance, after which all entered the castle, and it vanished with them. Later on, the king and eleven of his courtiers, disguised 'after the manner of Italy called a mask, a thing not seen before in England,' in long garments embroidered with gold, came in, with six silk-clad torch-bearers, and invited the ladies to tread a measure with them; and after dancing and communing together, took their leave, and departed. When the Queen of Scots took part in the festivities in 1517, there was brought into the Hall an artificial garden, enclosed with gold railings, with towers at each corner, and banks of artificial flowers. In the centre stood a pillar of gold set with precious stones, bearing on its summit an embowered arch, spanning bushes of roses and pomegranates. At another time, as their majesties entered the Hall, there suddenly appeared a tent of cloth of gold, guarded by four knights, armed from top to toe, who were immediately assailed by four others similarly accoutred. While they were fighting fiercely, eight wild men, with ugly weapons and uglier visages, rushed out of a wood, upon which the quondam foes united against the new-comers, and after a long combat drove them out of the Hall; whereupon the tent opened, and six couples, richly attired, came out and danced. These disguisings were expensive affairs, the silk and gold stuff used upon one occasion alone costing six hundred pounds. In 1525, the winter was a season of such mortality in London, that Henry kept his Christmas without any of the customary entertainments, which made the people dub it 'the still Christmas;' and just before he married Anne Boleyn, he passed a mirthless holiday at Greenwich, Catharine and her ladies declining, under the circumstances, to put in an appearance. As Henry became older and less active, his Christmases grew gradually duller, until he did little more than sit out a play or two, and gamble with his courtiers; and it appears from the record of his privy expenses, that his majesty was in the habit of drawing upon the treasury for a hundred pounds for Christmas play-money, while ten pounds sufficed him for his private alms.

When, in his successor's reign, the enemies of the Duke of Somerset proved too strong for that popular nobleman, they sought to divert the minds of prince and people, by ordering that Christmas

should be solemnly kept at Greenwich 'with open household and frank resort to court.' By order of the Council, a wise and learned gentleman, Master George Ferrers, was appointed Lord of Misrule; but in consideration of his being a man of better credit than his predecessors in that office, he received his commission as Master of the King's Pastimes. His suite consisted of his heir-apparent, two natural sons, an orator, interpreter and jailer, counsellors, gentlemen-ushers, footmen, pages, jugglers, messengers, huntsmen, heralds, and trumpeters. He was not stinted for money, one of his many dresses costing fifty-two pounds, while half that amount was spent upon the fool who enacted the part of his heir. Ferrers displayed such taste and ingenuity in concocting interludes and other entertainments, that he not only pleased the common multitude, but satisfied the Council and delighted the young king, who rewarded him with princely liberality, and retained his services for a second year.

Mary, both before and after her marriage, kept her Christmas in more sullen fashion, the hall-door at Hampton Court being continually shut, so that none could enter the precincts of the palace without first explaining their business, 'which seemed strange to Englishmen that had not been used thereto,' and remembered how her father welcomed any decently behaved subject to his table at such times. Those free-and-easy days never came back again. Elizabeth kept Christmas after a more cheerful fashion than her sister, but she did not open her palace-gates much wider. She was pretty well surfeited with complimentary pageants and masks during her summer progresses, so it is not surprising that she gave the players and strange tumblers the preference when Christmas came round. In 1568, the Earl of Shrewsbury, writing from Hampton Court to his countess, says: 'The Plague is disposed far abroad in London, so that the Queene keeps hur Kyrsomas her, and goth not to Grenwyth as it was mete.' Meet or not, Elizabeth generally passed that season at Hampton Court, banqueting, dancing, and dicing—the last being a favourite amusement with her, because she always won, thanks to her dice being loaded, so as only to throw the higher numbers.

Plays and masques were the principal features of the Christmas amusements at the court of James. The old disguising had by this time developed itself into a pretentious semi-dramatic, semi-operatic allegorical extravaganza, tasking the united talents of poet and painter, musician and machinist, dancing-master and costumer. The stage-manager, as we should call him, must have had no enviable task in schooling the actors and actresses for their performance, the characters being cast among the principal ladies and gentlemen of the court, while in not a few cases the queen and the Prince of Wales figured in the chief parts. Ben Jonson was retained for many years as masque-writer to the court, until he quarrelled with his coadjutor, Inigo Jones, who, Ben complained, thought painting and carpentry the soul of masque. It was Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, performed at Whitehall in 1605, of which Sir Dudley Carleton wrote to his friend: 'There was a great engine at the lower end of the room, and in it were the images of sea-horses, with other terrible fishes, which were ridden by Moors. The indecorum was that there was all fish and no water. At the further end was a great shell in the form of a scallop, wherein were four

seats. In the lowest sat the queen with my Lady Bedford; in the rest were placed my Ladies Suffolk, Derby, Richmond, Effingham, Ann Herbert, Susan Herbert, Elizabeth Howard, Walsingham, and Bevil. Their apparel was rich, but too light and courtesan-like for such great ones. Instead of vizards, their faces and arms up to the elbows were painted black, which was disguise sufficient, for they were hard to be known; but it became them nothing so well as their red and white, and you cannot imagine a more ugly sight than a troop of lean-cheeked Moors. The night's work was concluded with a banquet in the great chamber, which was so furiously assaulted, that down went table and tressels before one bit was touched.' This masque ought to have been a great success, seeing three thousand pounds were expended upon its getting up.

The Christmas following, the Earl of Essex, then fourteen years old, was married to the future murderess of Overbury, then a girl of thirteen; and apropos of the event, the royal masque was called the *Masque of Hymen*. The actors in this entertainment were dressed so magnificently that the Spanish ambassador looked but poor by the side of the meanest among them; and it was said the masquers must have borrowed every valuable jewel in the court or city. So fond of these things were both James and his consort, that when Prince Henry died in November 1612, the loss of the heir-apparent did not prevent his parents from enjoying themselves as usual the ensuing Christmas. Gaining still held its place at court, no one being allowed to play at Christmas unless prepared to lose at least three hundred pounds; when their majesties were not disposed to play themselves, they played vicariously; upon one occasion, the queen's representative managed to lose four hundred pounds for her during the evening's play; and upon another, the gentleman acting for the king rose from the table the richer by seven hundred and fifty pounds, which James generously told him to pocket for his trouble.

Charles I., who had in the days of his principedom obtained great applause in Jonson's *Vision of Delight*, kept Christmas in much the same way as his father before him, until the Puritans nearly abolished Christmas altogether. Charles II. had no liking for poetry upon stilts, and though nothing loath to feast his friends at Christmas-tide, preferred taking his ease at the playhouse, to sitting out amateur performances at Whitehall. We find no record in Pepys's Diary of anything like the old royal Christmas; the only courtly ceremony the prattling Secretary makes a note of, is the Christmas-eve service in the Queen's Chapel in 1667, which disappointed him sadly. 'I got in,' says Pepys, 'almost up to the rail, and with a great deal of patience, stayed from nine at night to two in the morning, in a very great crowd; and there expected, but found nothing extraordinary, there being nothing but a high-mass. The queen was there and some ladies. But Lord! what an odd thing it was for me to be in a crowd of people, here a footman, there a beggar, here a fine lady, there a zealous poor papist, and here a Protestant, two or three together come to see the show. I was afraid of my pocket being picked very much.' And very sorry he was he had gone, for he expected 'to have had a child born and dressed there, and there was nothing like it done.'

Here end our notes on Royal Christmases.

Succeeding sovereigns have kept the festal-week in a quiet sort of way, but *the* Royal Christmases went out with the Martyr, and did not come in again with the Merry Monarch.

Cousin Bob's First Love.

I WAS staying last winter with a relative who understands comfort. Until he married and settled in the country, a couple of years ago, he had been a college Fellow, and profited by his opportunities to such an extent that he has laid down a railway on his dining-room mantel-piece, and furnished the apartment with several small but firm and solid tables, which are placed round the fire at dessert-time; and his whim is, that his guests should sit in a semicircle about the hearth, with a table for every pair, and that the decanters should travel by hand, like a gentleman in a sedan-chair, and by easy stages, from one chimney-corner to the other, and then take the rail across the chord of the arc to their starting-point. And it is a curious illustration of the saving of fatigue in modern travelling, that the rapid journey across has no apparent effect upon their constitutions, while the slower passage from table to table takes a great deal out of them. He has another fancy, arising probably from a ten years' surfeit of masculine society, which is, that when the party is small and sociable, the ladies should not retire; and I regret to say that this innovation is not always so highly appreciated by either sex as it should be.

As a general rule, however, the experiment is a success, for he has an inexhaustible fund of animal spirits, and a talent for drawing people out of their shells.

One evening, we were particularly cosy. There were eight of us, all relations or intimate friends.

'Let us put out the gas, and tell stories,' said the youngest of the party.

'Good, as to the stories; but why put out the gas?'

'Oh, because stories go better with firelight; besides, people tell things about themselves more plainly the less clearly they are seen. At school, the girls would let out all sorts of secrets after we had gone to bed.'

'Lyddy is right. I will turn off the gas.—There! Now, who will do a bit of secular confession?'

Lyddy looked carefully round, and said: 'Cousin Bob.'

'Yes, of course; he has hardly spoken all the evening, and must have been meditating.—Come, Bob, tell us what has occupied your thoughts.'

'I was reflecting upon the folly of mankind, which values turkeys in proportion to their bigness, whereas a small turkey is infinitely nicer than a large one. I was also speculating upon whether a cassowary could digest a mince-pie. I think not.'

'Come, come, Bob, though you are an old bachelor, an epicure, and a lawyer, you must have an interesting reminiscence for us. What romantic stories you must become acquainted with in the course of business, for example.'

'Well, I am not exactly in the habit of betraying the confidence of my clients; but if you would like to hear an outline of the case of Dodds and Glover, I will make an exception in your favour. It is rather dry. You see, Dodds is trustee for a burial-ground, and the vicar'—

'Oh, oh! No, no!'

'It is of no use, I fear; Bob has no romance in him.'

'Romance! I have done with that the last twenty years.'

'Then you were romantic once!' cried Lyddy. (Sharp girl that.) 'Tell us.'

'Yes, at your age, Lyddy, I was an inhabitant of an ideal world, for I knew nothing of the real one. My parents lived in a most secluded manner; and as they had peculiar notions on the subject of education, they never sent me to school. My father had an idea that it ought to be the great joy of his life to watch my mind open, just as if it were an oyster!—By the by, you are right to serve them in the top shells, Morton.—I expect that you have not all read Spenser's *Fairy Queen*, at least not quite through; and as for *Amadis of Gaul*, I will bet even that none of you have ever opened its pages. Those two books were my favourites; I knew great parts of them by heart. I wrote a little poetry myself, and some of it was thought rather pretty: my *Field Mouse*, and *Stanzas to an Autumnal Fly*, for example. Would you like to hear my *Autumnal Fly*?—No! That is fortunate, for I fear that it is obsolete. I was sent at last to a private tutor, who was to prize that mind of mine open a little wider, and above what was needful for matriculation at the university into the gap. Here, at last, I might have had a chance of a glimpse at the True, one would have thought; but, unfortunately, my tutor was a poor and hard-working curate, in a thinly-populated district; a good man, who, when he was not coaching me or walking over the moors to outlying parishioners, was entirely preoccupied with coal-tickets, tracts, sore legs, rheumatisms, twins, and such like. And I had no fellow-pupil. So, if possible, I got rather worse instead of better, and commenced an epic in six books. Likewise, if you must have it, I fell in love.'

'Hurrah! Pass the bottle before he begins. Empty, and take a back-hander, Bob. Now, then.'

'It really was rather a romantic affair. I was walking out alone one day, in search of an appetite and an inspiration, when I came to a house and garden surrounded by a high wall, at the foot of a hill. The appetite I had little difficulty about in those happy days; but the inspiration hung fire, and the epic poem could not for the life of it get over the third stanza of the first canto, where it had stuck for weeks. To soar above the world a bit, might help me, so I turned to the hill, and tried the Excelsior plan. When I had mounted a couple of hundred feet of slippery grass, I was out of breath, throbbing at the temples, and damp; so I turned about, and sat down on a convenient sheep-path, to see if the Muse was inclined to strike up yet. The Muse still sulked; but I had a capital bird's-eye view of the garden beneath me, which was large, and laid out with thick and shady shrubberies; and in a walk which intersected one of these, I caught the glimpse of a female robe.'

'Now, a poet who catches sight of a petticoat while he is in the very crucible of composition, is bound to become enamoured, unless, indeed, it is on a clothes-line, or he is already in love with some one else—and I am not sure that he would always be safe even in those contingencies. I was clean bowled on the instant. However susceptible, a prosaic man would have waited till he saw whether she had a hump or a wooden leg, or was nearest sixteen or sixty; but my instinct told me that she

was young and lovely. In half a minute, she emerged into a clear space, and faith! my instinct was right. Though she was rather far off, I was long-sighted, and could tell that.

'As when the sportsman, intent on shooting a rabbit in cover, watches the furze-bush from which he expects the furred creature to appear next, so did I gaze on the gaps in the trees through which the sylph-like form would presently glide, and then I watched her till she once more disappeared beneath the leaves, and I had to look for an opening further on.

'At length she happened to turn her eyes towards the hill, and so became aware of my presence. There was one point of sympathy between us established already; she too must be long-sighted, for she could evidently distinguish that I was not a shepherd, at least in the practical sense of tending sheep—in the Arcadian meaning, I was a little in that line—for she would not otherwise have taken so much notice of me; standing still and looking full at me; walking on, and stealing hurried side-glances; watching me from sheltered spots where she fancied I could not detect her.

'After playing at bo-peep for about a quarter of an hour, the deep tones of a bell were heard, and she hurried off towards the house. As she took one last look in my direction, I rose up and laid my hand upon my heart; she waved her handkerchief in answer, and vanished. On the following day, I returned to the same spot at the same hour, and saw her again. I took off my hat; she waved her parasol; I kissed my hand, she kissed hers. The flirtation was as desperate as it well could be, considering the distance between us, and the insecure nature of my footing.

'I continued to haunt that hill: sometimes, I saw the divinity of the garden, and sometimes I did not; but when I did, she was always alone, and we exhausted our ingenuity in exchanging sentiments by signs.

'However timid and respectful a lover may be, he does desire after a time to approach nearer than a hundred yards to the object of his affections, and that was the closest I could get by stationing myself on the lowest spot which commanded a view over the wall. Besides, to enable a telegraph to work satisfactorily, the parties communicating by it should meet together first to explain what their signals mean. So my heart leaped with gladness when, on the fifth day of pantomimic performance, she unmistakably beckoned to me. I ran down the hill and was under the wall in half a minute.

"Are you there?" asked the softest and sweetest voice (present company always excepted) that I ever heard.

"Loveliest and fairest, I am."

'Bang came something on the top of my hat. It was a large stone, with the following note attached to it by a piece of string:

"Mysterious unknown, are you another foe or a friend? A secret instinct inclines me to deem you the latter. Know you my pitiable story? Have you sought me out, and come to my rescue? Or have you been drawn by a mysterious magnetic power to the foot of these walls, ignorant of whom they contain? If the latter, inquire not of others, lest your questions excite suspicion. There are spies everywhere. I myself will my 'tale unfold' (Shakspeare) in fitting time and place. Speak not, but adopt my method of communication."

'The style was, to my then taste, charming. The ('Shakspeare') was rather eccentric perhaps; but did it not shew a sweetly tender conscience, only too rare in these days of wholesale plagiarism?

'I should have liked to have returned an answer in poetry, but there was not time for an impromptu. So I tore a leaf (there were plenty of blank ones) out of the note-book intended for my epic (which indeed eventually proved to be all *blank verse*), and wrote the following letter:

"Fair and afflicted lady, you are right; I am indeed a friend; and I know not who you are. An almighty influence—need I name it?—has drawn me towards you. I know nothing, I seek to know nothing, but that I am your blind and devoted slave."

'Pretty, was it not? Well, I tied that to the stone, and remembering my own accident, and that my charmer did not wear a tall, stiff hat, I uttered a warning-cry, and tossed the missive over the wall. Then I ran up the hill, to see how she liked it, and ascended high enough in time to observe the whole process of reading the note, which she did holding it at arm's-length, clutching it with both hands, lips parted. If she had studied under a pre-Raphaelite painter, she could not have done it better.

'What I had said seemed to be satisfactory to her, for when she had read it, she kissed the note twice, and thrust it into her bosom; looked up at the sky, clasped her hands, and walked rapidly off towards the house, without attempting to communicate with me further.

'Immediately after that commencement of a correspondence, wet weather set in, and I did not see the mystery of my heart for a week; at the end of that time, the sun reappeared, and on mounting guard on my hill, I perceived that she was once more in the garden. She appeared glad to see me, and motioned me down to the foot of the wall again, and when I was there, tossed me over another letter:

"I cannot fully trust you till I have scanned your features more closely. Swim the moat and scale the battlements, so shall we converse at ease."

'What did she mean by a moat? Was it a playful allusion to the quantity of rain that had fallen? Or a sarcastic intimation that the difficulties I had to overcome were trifling indeed to those which lovers in the good old times thought nothing of? Or was she merely indulging in a poetical license? I left all this for future consideration: the battlements were indubitably the wall, and her meaning was sufficiently plain for immediate practical enterprise.

"I come, fair lady, I come!" I cried, looking about for a good climbing situation. But the wall had been newly pointed, and there were no cracks or crannies into which finger or boot tips could be insinuated. A smooth surface was presented to me, up which a cat might possibly have run, though I doubt it, but before which a clawless creature was helpless.

'I was now well provided with writing materials, and I explained my difficulty on gold-edged, tinted, and scented note-paper, promising, however, to get over it and up the wall next day, or to perish in the attempt; though how either alternative was to be accomplished, I could not for the life of me imagine.

'But the night brought counsel; and on the following morning, I procured several large nails, or

staples, and a mallet; and going to the place earlier than usual, and first ascertaining from my post on the hillside that the coast was clear, I proceeded to drive a nail into the mortar at about three feet from the ground, another higher up, and then, standing on the lowest, and holding on to the other with my left hand, I knocked a third in still higher; and so, after many tumbles and abrasions of the skin, I contrived a series of points of advantage, which enabled me to scramble high enough to catch hold of the top of the wall, and then I was all right, for there were no broken bottles along the coping.

"The task completed, I dropped to the ground and ran up the hill to the post of observation, and there I sat till the lady made her appearance; then I waved my hat in triumph, rushed down, sprang up the wall, and seated myself on the top of it. Beneath me stood the object of my affections, so close that I could scan her every feature, catch her faintest sigh. That was a great trial, for I had let my imagination take the bit between its teeth upon the subject of her charms; and a coarse complexion, irregular teeth, or large ears, would have disenchanted me. But she really was a remarkably handsome girl, with a sort of anxious, distressed look in her eyes, which appealed strongly to the sympathies. There was a certain eccentric, tragedy-way with her, which ordinary worldlings might have taken exception at, but which only served to rivet my chains the faster.

"'Tis well," she said, when she had gazed on me in silence for a somewhat embarrassing minute. "Now turn your face sideways: 'tis again well. Your features recommend you, but they are sometimes deceitful. Can I really, truly trust you?"

"Loveliest and dearest, you can," I replied from the top of the wall. "I will lay down my life to serve you."

"I accept," she said in solemn tones, which gave me rather a thrill. One does not expect one's words to be taken up in that literal way.

"I had sooner live for you, though," I hastened to add; and take this opportunity of apologising to the spirit of the original utterer of that joke for the theft.

"Thanks, thanks!" she explained. "And what will you do for me? How prove that devotion which I doubt not?"

"It was more convenient for a youth under age, entirely destitute both of resources and experience, and situated in a precarious position on the top of a wall, to deal in generalities, than to propose any definite course of action. I was puzzled for a moment, but suddenly remembered with relief that I was in complete ignorance as to who she was and what she wanted, and that it was only reasonable that the direction in which my chivalrous path was to lie should be pointed out by her.

"True," she said, when I mentioned this fact. "I must trust you with my sad secret. Know, then, that I am not what I seem. Doubtless, you take me for an Englishwoman, for I speak your tongue with fluency and correctness; but no: I am a Russian princess. A cruel and wicked cousin coveted my estates, to which he was the next heir. He sought to acquire them by the lawful means of marriage, but being a man of ungovernable temper, he one day had a serf knouted to death before my eyes; and I loathed and dreaded him. The sting of outraged vanity was then added to his cupidity, and he determined to dispossess me. But I was a

favourite with the Czar, the Czarina, and all the royal family; and while I remained in Russia, I was safe. But a sad infatuation tempted me to travel; and the moment I touched these inhospitable shores, I was seized and hurried to this place, where I have been incarcerated ever since. Doubtless, my villainous relative has spread the report of my death, and is squandering my property upon his minions."

"But," cried I with an enthusiasm which nearly made me lose my balance, "the matter is simple. I will go to the nearest magistrate; I will seek the aid of the police—I will!"

"Pray—pray, do nothing of the kind!" she exclaimed with alarm. "My enemy is connected by the strongest ties with your prime minister, and the chief of your police is in his power. One word to the authorities, and my cause is lost for ever! No; flight is my only resource. Aid my escape; fly with me; bring me to my native land, and I am saved. Eternal gratitude and countless treasures shall be yours."

"And may I not presume to a higher reward?" I asked.

"What mean you?" she replied bashfully.

"I fear lest my temerity should offend you," said I; "but love is ever presumptuous. And if I could only hope that my affection might one day meet with a return, I should be inspired with an ardour before which all obstacles would melt away."

"This was pretty well for a bashful lad, was it not? I do not believe I could have spoken such words in an ordinary drawing-room, had my life depended upon it; but from the top of a wall it was different. Further advance was impossible, and retreat so easy! And yet, when one comes to think of it, to make an offer of marriage to a princess on a first interview was a prompt proceeding. It was successful, however, for I was accepted then and there, and all that remained was to make arrangements for our flight.

"I had several other conversations from the top of the wall with my princess before our plans were matured. The great difficulty was funds. Once in Russia, and we should be encumbered with a superfluity of wealth; but we had to get there. It was a difficulty which never occurred to the knights of old, who always tossed their purses to those who demanded money of them, and yet had other purses for the next comer, and I was therefore at a loss for a precedent.

"I had three pounds ten shillings of pocket-money; and by pawning my watch, chain, pin, and a ring, I raised ten pounds more; but that was sadly insufficient for so long a journey. I was obliged at length to explain the difficulty to my princess, who removed it at once. She had jewels, which, even if sold for a minute fraction of their value, would provide us with ample funds, and she would bring them with her.

"So the day was absolutely fixed, and our plans carefully laid. The only hour at which the princess had an opportunity for escape was that when we usually communicated; we must therefore take the extra risk of a mid-day flight, and speedy discovery and pursuit. We were to make our way on foot to a seaport town some seven miles off, and take ship from thence to Hamburg, where we were to be married, and travel as fast as we could to St Petersburg. When all was arranged, I felt considerable compunction on reflecting upon the state of flurry into

which my poor tutor would be thrown by my mysterious disappearance, and the anxiety of my parents on first hearing of it. But how short would be their anxiety, for I would write and set their minds at rest the moment we were safe in a foreign land; and what pride and pleasure would be theirs when they learned that their son was a prince, with forests and a mine, and any number of serfs; not to mention the most lovely princess that ever existed out of the *Arabian Nights*!

'Would marrying a princess make me a prince, though? I was not certain about that. But what is in a name? The solid advantages remained.

'And so, one fine afternoon, I, the man of the world, the realistic, fusty old lawyer now addressing you, positively climbed to the top of the wall, and let down a rope-ladder of my own manufacture; and when my princess had clambered up it, I caught her in my arms, seated her beside me, and began arranging the rope-ladder for her descent on the other side. Hurried and excited as I was, I yet perceived that the princess had not exaggerated the value of her jewels. She had on diamond earrings of such size that they dangled to her shoulders; long pendants of shape and dimensions such as I had never seen in precious stones before; indeed, if I had not known, I should have taken them for the glass ornaments of a chandelier.

"My knight! my deliverer!" exclaimed the princess—"What a go this is, isn't it?" she added presently in quite a different tone; and then springing up and down in a childish fashion, she commenced singing:

Humpty-dumpty sat on a wall;
Humpty-dumpty had a great fall.

"Hollo, there! what are you after?" shouted a hoarse voice from the garden; and on looking in that direction, I saw two servants running up, and a portly gentleman in their rear.

"Here is the rope; let yourself down: we are discovered!" I cried to my companion.

"Humpty-dumpty sat on a wall," she sang, seizing me by the shoulders.

"It is no time for play, dearest," I remonstrated; "but be quick, and we may yet give them the slip."

"Humpty-dumpty had a great fall," she continued to sing; and to illustrate her words, she gave me a sudden push, and over I went into the garden, alighting—not on my feet.

"Run and fetch the ladder," said the gentleman to one of his servants—"That is a nice airy seat you have chosen, dear Miss Seymour. May I be permitted to join you?"

"Certainly, doctor. It seems this gentleman could not keep his place.

All the king's horses and all the king's men
Could not pick Humpty up again!"

And the princess pointed to me as she sang the words; and then she laughed so heartily that she nearly rolled off the wall; and then she crowed, I do not mean like a baby, but like a cock. And then the ladder came, and she was got away into the house.

"And now, sir," said the doctor to me, "what have you got to say, that I should not give you into custody?"

"I wonder whether I looked like a fool. If my features are capable of assuming such an expression, I should imagine that they seized that opportunity

of doing so. I made a clean breast of it, giving my name and address; and the doctor was very good-natured about the affair. But there was no doubt about my having been on the point of running off with a very dangerous lunatic.'

'Just as—pardon me for saying so, Cousin Bob—she was about running off with a very innocent one.'

'You are quite right, Lyddy. And so, from having been a perfect sot in romance, I became a total abstainer.'

R A M A Z A N

It has been remarked by a recent European writer* on the manners and feelings of the modern Persians, that not one out of twenty of that nation is a sincere follower of the tenets of Islam. Whether this be so or not, there is one respect in which, without any fear of being gainsaid, one may certainly assert that the Persians do most strictly observe the precepts of the law of Mohammed. The inhabitants of the land of Iran do not enjoy the reputation of being truthful or honest, or modest or virtuous. Many of them are hard drinkers, almost to an extent beyond the conception of those who have not personally witnessed this peculiarity on their part. They are brutal in their vices, and utterly regardless of most of the precepts of the Koran. But in one respect no one can with justice accuse them of any shortcoming. If for eleven months of the year they roll sin like a sweet morsel under the tongue, they do their best to make up for their transgressions during the other month of the twelve—the month of Ramazan. Like certain inhabitants of Judea of old, they are given to neglecting the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and the love of God; and like them, they are ever forward in the performance of the lighter duties enjoined by their religion.

It is one of the most general national customs of Persia to go out to meet a stranger of distinction upon his arrival at any city or town; and this custom is imitated for the sake of doing honour to the fast of Ramazan. That season, according to the religious law, extends only over the space of one month; but those Persians who are really or ostensibly religious, go beyond the actual requirements of the law by fasting the day previous to the commencement of the month of Ramazan. This preliminary fast is called the 'Istikbal,' or reception of the Ramazan. With the same idea of doing honour to the holy month, these men do not give up their fast when the required period is over, but accompany the Ramazan one day's journey nearer to the end of time, as they would a stranger of distinction on his departure from their town. It is very remarkable that this one religious duty should win such marked obedience from thousands of men by whom, as far as can be seen, almost all other religious duties are looked upon with absolute indifference.

Some weeks ago, I had occasion, in travelling, to pass two days in the house of a Persian

* Count de Gobineau.

gentleman. No one could be more assiduous in the cultivation of the worship of Bacchus than were he and his friends during that time. At early morning, they began to drain the glasses which they had placed by them overnight, and from then till evening they were never for any considerable period of time without drinking wine and the strongest spirits. It was on the eve of Ramazan, and they assured me that during that month they would not on any account permit the forbidden liquor to pass their lips. At another place, I was asked to dine with the governor. It was the first day of Ramazan, and though there was wine on the table, he drank nothing during dinner-time except lemonade. The Persian servant who accompanied me on my journey would not even avail himself of the permission accorded to all travellers to postpone the days of fasting until their arrival at their journey's end. From morning till night, we rode under the warm sun of Persia, but not a morsel of food or a drop of water passed the man's lips from sunrise till sunset. Mohammedan kings are by custom exempted from the obligation to observe this fast—not from any favour shewn to them, but lest their subjects should suffer from the consequences of their ill-temper or ill-health. The ruler of Persia has on some occasions employed a priest to perform a month's fast for him, the holy man being understood to undergo a month's abstinence on his own account at a later period. But not even kindly exemption and the certainty that the required fast will be performed for him by another, are sufficient always to satisfy the conscience of the Shah, who insists on undergoing, in most years, a portion of the required religious ordinance. During the long day of fasting, men flock to the mosques to listen to religious addresses, and altogether one would be inclined to infer, from the aspect of things during this month, that the Persians were a most religious and God-fearing people. They do not attempt to cut short the appointed hours of fasting. The matter is not regulated by any individual for himself, but a gun fires in the morning before sunrise, and in the evening after sunset, for the purpose of giving warning to all when it is not, and when it is, lawful to eat. The firing of this gun at evening must, I have often thought, be committed to the care of a misanthrope, for it is not until long after the star of day has sunk beneath the western horizon that the permissive gun is heard to boom through the air. Then men rush to wet their lips with water, and hasten to enjoy the *kalem*, which in other months is their hourly solace. During the night, the city presents a far more lively appearance during the month of Ramazan than it does at any other season of the year. The baths are open during the night, and crowds of women and of men flock to them. Dinner-parties are of nightly occurrence, though the evening-meal is a light one, the principal repast being taken immediately before daylight. Children under the age of puberty are exempted from the observance of this fast, but in many cases they volunteer to imitate in this respect the conduct of their elders. Women, even when nursing children, are required to keep the fast, and for the days when they are excused from fasting, they are obliged to abstain for an equal portion of time at a later period. In this manner

does the Persian nation conduct itself during this holy month, and having rendered a service no agreeable to Heaven, thinks itself justified in resuming its previous course of vice and profligacy.

THE MONTH: SCIENCE AND ARTS.

THE president of the Royal Society, in his anniversary address to the Fellows of that honourable corporation, discusses some important questions. Scientific students all over the world will rejoice to hear that the first volume of the great catalogue of scientific papers and researches collected from thousands of learned books published in the first sixty-three years of the present century, is now finished, and will shortly be distributed. Under a committee of the Royal Society this work has been in progress during nearly ten years. When complete, it will contain about two hundred and fifty thousand titles: hence any student desirous to know what has been written on any scientific subject since the year 1800 will have only to look into the great *Catalogue of Scientific Papers*.

Another topic in which the public take interest is the Meteorological Department of the Board of Trade—the Weather Office, as it might be called. This office has now been reorganised, and with a view to obtain an accurate knowledge of the meteorology of the British Islands, observatories are to be established in different places, where observations will be regularly made with self-recording instruments, all constructed on the same plan. Five of them—namely, at Falmouth, Kew, Stonyhurst, Armagh, and Glasgow—will commence operations with the new year, and, as soon as possible afterwards, Valentia and Aberdeen will be added to the list. These include a wide range from north to south and from east to west, and it is thought that in time such a knowledge of the laws of the weather in our islands may be gained, as will enable the office to issue trustworthy forecasts. Meanwhile, the director, Mr Scott, sends by post or by telegraph information of the state of the weather at different parts of the coast to various ports where it may be useful to mariners. He will make known facts only, and not venture to prophesy until he can do so with a certainty of the result.

The great four-foot reflecting telescope to be used at Melbourne will soon be ready for shipment; so that we may hope ere long to hear that a competent astronomer is at work at the antipodes on a survey of the grand phenomena of the southern sky. And, as there will be a total eclipse of the sun in 1868, of long duration, visible in India, the Royal Society have sent out instruments, which will be used by competent officers, for observation of the eclipse, from which it is hoped further knowledge will be acquired of the constitution of the sun. From these, which are but a few particulars from General Sabine's address, it will be seen that science has made good progress of late, and promises well for the year to come.

Abyssinia and other 'globular' topics made a striking opening for the session of the Geographical Society. The fighting men who are to bring Emperor Theodore to reason will be accompanied by geologists, botanists, geographers, photographers, electricians, and other scientific operators, who are to make good use of their eyes and hands, and tell

us everything about Abyssinia and its products when they come back. Such a combination of science and hostility has never before marched under the British flag.

Sir Roderick Murchison has announced that in letters received from Africa he has news of a white man travelling in the neighbourhood of Lake Tanganyika, who, it is pretty safe to infer, must be Dr Livingstone. This news lends confirmation to the opinion expressed by the Rev. Dr Wilson of Bombay, that as none of the native African converts who accompanied the zealous explorer had returned, there was good reason for believing he had not perished, as was reported.

The terrible hurricane in the West Indies, with its havoc of life and property, has revived among meteorologists the discussion about the laws of storms, in the hope that a way may be found to guard against such furious outbursts in future. Lives lost by thousands is a calamity which will shock charity as well as science into remedial activity.—Of another complexion is the news from Palestine, where the diligent excavators, with their deep shafts, drifts, and cuttings, are bringing to light the Jerusalem of King Solomon's day, disinterring its massive masonry, and identifying buildings and sites which are of profoundest interest to the whole Christian world. The explorers' intimation that their funds are all but exhausted will no doubt produce such a replenishment of their treasury as will enable them to accomplish all they desire in their search for the Holy City.

While these excavations have been carried on in Palestine, the searchers of the barrows on the Yorkshire Wolds have opened more of the ancient mounds; and in Shropshire, fresh discoveries have been made in Wroxeter, the old Roman city. A smithy is brought to light, with two fireplaces, and numerous lumps of slag strewn about the floor. A considerable extent of the city wall is laid bare, and found to be as well finished down to the very foundations as above ground; and what is remarkable, a passage, as if for a drain, is left within the lower courses. Numerous small articles of domestic use and ornaments have been dug out, and are now placed with others in the museum at Shrewsbury.

A great scheme, which has occupied the attention of the present and former governments for some years, is now to be put into execution—namely, that government shall have the entire control and working of all the telegraph lines in the kingdom, in the same way as it has of the Post-office. When we see what has been accomplished in Switzerland and other countries by one central management of the telegraphs, we cannot doubt but that a similar system will be advantageous to this country. Messages will be sent cheaply, and on a uniform scale of charges; and all the cost of twenty or thirty different boards of directors, with their secretaries and other functionaries, will be saved.

In September last, an earthquake took place at Canea, in Crete, which was followed by a rapid fall in the level of the sea, and in the water of wells; then a return to the former level. And during this time a remarkable phenomenon occurred. The copper bottom of H.M.S. *Wizard*, then at anchor in the port, became suddenly bright and clean, in consequence, as is supposed, of powerful galvanic currents in the sea acting on the metal,

and causing the deposit of weeds and barnacles to fall off. If similar currents could be produced by artificial means, all the copper bottoms in the royal navy could be cleaned and brightened every time they entered a port. In connection with this, we may mention that Vesuvius is again in eruption, pouring out lava, and throwing up great columns of fire to a height of a thousand feet.

A highly important paper has been read at a meeting of the Royal Society of Victoria, at Melbourne, 'On the Extraction of Gold,' in which the author, Mr H. A. Thompson, describes a method for preventing the great loss that now takes place in extracting gold from the ore. In old mining works, the loss has long been estimated at twenty-five per cent.; in California, it is eighty dollars in every ton of ore; and in Australia, thirty-five per cent. of the whole amount of gold contained in the quartz. Hence, that which the miners fling away as waste would yield a large fortune to a metallurgist clever enough to get all the gold out of the stone. Mr Thompson shews that this can be done. The exceedingly minute particles of gold found in the quartz, and in the pyrites which forms so large a part of the auriferous deposits, and which at present are either not separated or are washed away, can be separated and retained by an improved process of roasting in a new oxidating furnace. In this, the sulphurous and arsenious acids are driven off, the pyrites is brought into a state of complete disintegration, and gives up its gold readily. In addition to this improved process of roasting, a new 'percussion table' has been introduced, with which the valuable portions of the ore are more effectually separated and kept from washing away, than by any other mechanical appliance hitherto tried at the mines. The result is eminently satisfactory: the loss of gold, instead of being an ounce per ton, was reduced to three pennyweights; and if this method can be brought into use throughout the colonies, the yield of Australian gold will be increased by one million sterling a year.

New York boasts of having the largest and most beautiful public park in the world. The engineer by whom it was planned and executed is about to build the largest and longest suspension-bridge in the world, to connect New York and Brooklyn, now separated from each other by an arm of the sea, subject to strong tides. The span will be 1600 feet, and the height above the water 130 feet, and the total length, reckoning the approaches by a series of arches on each side, will be nearly two miles. The suspension will be effected by four wire cables, each fourteen inches in diameter, hung from towers built of granite, and 350 feet in height. The width of the bridge will allow for a footway in the centre, two horse railways, and two roadways for ordinary vehicles. The cost of this great bridge is estimated at six million dollars.

Importers and manufacturers of silk may perhaps take interest in a communication made to the Entomological Society by Captain Hutton, who, writing from Mussoorie, India, states that the Japanese mulberry-feeding silk-worm, which yields green cocoons, and has been much sought after recently, is only a sickly and degenerate hybrid. To attempt to renew or recruit the European stock with this worm would therefore be a mistake, and Captain Hutton recommends that experienced entomologists should be sent to travel in China until they rediscover the original silk-worm in its

natural condition. The question is one which concerns naturalists as well as traders: can they not combine to settle it?

Sir John Lubbock, President of the Entomological Society, in his annual address published in the last part of the Society's *Transactions*, discusses the question as to the sensibility and reasoning power of insects, and decides it in the affirmative. 'Of all living animals,' he remarks, 'the chimpanzee and the gorilla, in their bones, muscles, viscera, &c. most nearly approximate to man, and the "determination of the difference between Homo and Pithecus," is, in the words of Professor Owen, "the anatomist's difficulty;" but if we judge animals by their intelligence, as evidenced in their actions and mode of life, we may fairly claim for entomology a high rank in biological science, for in that respect it is not the gorilla or the chimpanzee, but the bee, and, above all, the ant, which approach the nearest to man.'

JACK FROST.

JACK FROST is a wonderful artist indeed:

Builds castles with breath on the smooth-surfaced glass;
Leaves flowers wherever his bright feet doth tread,
And spreads a white carpet all over the grass.

He climbs to the top of the tall forest tree,
And crowns it with gems when the green leaves are gone.
Poor lovers of beauty and wonder are we,
If we prize not his work, so tastefully done.

He breathes on the wind-dimpled streamlet, and lo!
A bright shield of silver gleams on its soft breast!
Across the broad river his arms he doth throw,
And its fast-flowing waters are hushed into rest.

Fantastic and strange are the pictures he draws,
With a pencil of beauty, wherever he goes.
Who'd seek in his works to find out any flaws,
Would try to improve the warm tint of the rose.

The spots unadorned yet by Beauty divine,
His fingers so nimble, so skilful and free,
Move over, and quickly with jewels they shine,
And look fair, as we dream elfin bowers to be.

I love him, although from a bow that's unseen,
He lets loose his swift-winged arrows of sleet,
As I cross the wide heath—their sting, sharp and keen,
But renders my cot, when I reach it, more sweet.

He comes to my garden, where Robin sings sweet
On the fence that is covered with roses in spring,
And makes it a palace of crystal complete,
Where fairies might dance in a jewel-wove ring.

His icicles fringing the bucket all worn,
That stands on the brink of the old woodland well,
Look brighter than dew-drops upon a May morn,
That gleam in the roses that grow in the dell.

Then come, O Jack Frost! from thy bleak northern home,
Thou beautiful jewel-robed wandering sprite;
Shew thy skill on the windows of my little room,
And spread o'er the meadows thy carpet of white.

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PRICE THREEPENNY.

UNDER ONE ROOF.

I WAS staying one December, with no intention of passing Christmas in the country, at Clevedon Court, in Bleakshire, when the snow suddenly came down in force (as is its habit in those parts), and blockaded it. It was the pleasantest sort of fortress that ever man was beleaguered in, and we, the garrison, made very light of the enemy. Our provisions were so ample, that after the manner of those who, to shew they could not be reduced by famine, were won't to hurl loaves of bread upon the besiegers, we opened a window daily, and placed a bottle of champagne in the snow. Nay, the foe was even pressed into our service, and used by some young people that were in the house for culinary purposes. I think the dish was called snow-pancake, and they professed to enjoy it amazingly, although it revenged itself upon me, their specially invited guest, by toothache. We were amply supplied with arms, too, in case of an assault by the commanding-officer on the other side (one, however, with a greater reputation for strategy than for active measures), General Ennui. There were books in plenty; in the library, whole walls of them; and the last number of *Chambers's Journal* had most providentially arrived the day before the siege commenced.

We had cards, and a three-cornered cribbage-board, to which Tom Clevedon, his pretty wife, and I sat down for an hour every night, and played with all our hearts—for sixpences! To see Mrs Clevedon pounce down upon Tom directly he had scored, convict him of inaccuracy, and exact the penalty by 'pegging,' was a most admirable spectacle. Moreover, I profited by it, since—by the rules of the game—what she added, I added, although my intelligence had not contributed to the result. Tom used to call us the Trades-union, because I, who did nothing, shared the gains with the more skilled mechanic, while he, the master, suffered for both. There was a billiard-room, too, where my host got rather the advantage of me, but where defeat was tempered by tobacco. In short, if any

reader experienced in Christmas stories, and presuming upon his reputation for sagacity, imagines that the being snowed up at Clevedon Court compelled us to *tell stories*, he is vastly mistaken.

As a matter of fact, under what possible circumstances do any persons, who have reached adolescence, sit down with the intention of telling stories? Have you ever seen it done at a club, for instance? Would you venture to propose to those dozen or so of respectable gentlemen who make up the three whist-tables so regularly at the *Rhadamanthus*, that they should put down those foolish cards, and each favour you with his private reminiscences? What do you think old Trumpington would reply to such a proposition, supposing that it left him voice wherewith to speak? He would probably offer to bet five to two (his favourite odds) that you were mad. Sharpize, too, would naturally oppose himself to an innovation which would deprive him of an afternoon's gains—Sharpize, who is so accustomed to win his money, that on a certain Derby-day, when the *Rhadamanthus* was deserted, he was heard to exclaim, with the Roman emperor, in a tone of penitential regret: 'I have lost a day.' Think of asking Sharpize to give up looking over his left-hand adversary's cards, and to dilate instead, to a mixed company, upon the principal features of his past history! If there is anything that Sharpize would not do for money, it would (I should fancy) be just that. Nor have I observed, even in private houses, that the habit much obtains of each guest narrating a story in turn, while the others listen—although one man will sometimes tell half-a-dozen in spite of the rest.

With children, indeed, it is different. Gussy Clevedon (aged seven), and Lily, his sister (six), were never tired of listening to tales, and were unhappily impressed with the idea that I was a born improvisatore. Nor were those juveniles easy to please. Like their seniors of the modern reading public, they would only accept narratives of a certain sensational type, and expressed an adverse

criticism with all the hateful frankness of professional reviewers.

'Is it a bad ghost, or is it a good ghost?' Lily would lisp, at the commencement of one of these exciting serials, with her little hand placed trustingly in mine, in case the coming terrors should prove too much for her courage.

But 'That's not half horrible enough,' was the verdict usually passed upon the tale by Gussy, who had a stronger stomach for sensation: 'I like a very, very bloody murder.'

As for Tom Clevedon and his wife and myself sitting down to tell stories to one another, it seemed just as probable that we should endeavour to dance a quadrille, or form ourselves into a solid square, or do anything else for which we had no sufficient materials. Mrs Clevedon, indeed, had a history of her own, which might have been well worth hearing. Tom (lucky dog) had found her an heiress, but it was whispered that she had not always had such pleasant prospects, and that in her childhood she had even suffered great privations. But then it was not to be expected that she would ever favour us (or at least *me*) with the particulars. Tom, too, although quite a famous raconteur as a bachelor—when I had the same chambers with the gay young fellow in town, just after we left college, everything used to 'remind him of an anecdote'—would as soon think of telling such anecdotes now as of being on the wrong side of the curtain at the opera. And as for me, I was a man of business; a partner (and not a sleeping one either) in the firm of Bullion Brothers, and the notes I dealt with were not those of the Bank of Fancy.

We had been fast friends for many years, and although our lines of life were very different, and Tom had married (a great strain on the tie of friendship), we slapped one another on the back, and began our friendly missives, as of old, with 'My dear old fellow;' and yet, in spite of this, or perhaps from an affectionate wish to keep our friendship not only unclouded, but without the shadow of a cloud, Tom had always been most scrupulous in those little exactions which all persons who are much together must now and then demand of one another.

'By the by,' said he, as we were smoking our cigars together after breakfast on the morning before Christmas-day (he always prefaced his unnecessary apologies by that form of speech, and while apologising, laid his hand upon one's shoulder)—'by the by, old fellow, I hope it won't annoy you very much to dine early to-day.'

'Certainly not, my dear boy; why should it? I dare say you will give me something to eat between the middle of the day and midnight; and whether that meal is called dinner or supper, is of no sort of consequence.'

'Ah, but that's not all,' continued he, with an air of ridiculous discomfort; 'you're not a family-man, Jack, and perhaps what I have to add will bore you tremendously. We didn't reckon upon the snow keeping you here over Christmas, you see.'

'Thank you, Tom.'

'Oh, I don't mean *that*, of course. We're glad to see you at all times. Only, on Christmas-eve we have a very peculiar custom. The comfort of the drawing-room folks is not so much attended to to-day as that of our domestics, and my wife and I sup in the servants-hall.'

'And a very good rule, too,' said I—'a fine patriarchal notion. I hope I shall be allowed to join the party.'

'Why, yes, of course, Jack. It would be considered very bad manners if you didn't come. They'd say you were proud, perhaps, not knowing you so well as I do. And yet'—

'And yet your good people and myself will be a source of mutual embarrassment to one another—eh, Tom? They are used to the presence of their master and mistress, but not to that of a strange gentleman—although I have been at Clevedon Court a dozen times, and ought not to be so very strange to them neither. Well, that's only natural. Suppose I go and burrow in a snowdrift, like that interesting old female, Elizabeth Woodcock, until I hear the bells ring in Christmas morning. Nay, seriously, I tell you what I *will* do: I'll pretend to be ill, and go to bed.'

'You will do nothing of the kind,' said Tom; 'but we must just make the best we can of it. It's ten to one that my wife hits upon some plan to pass the evening, and I will take good care, at all events, that there shall be lots of punch.'

It was plain that Tom had his misgivings, and I confess that I had also mine. There is nothing, I hope, like pride about me. The idea of folks giving themselves airs because they happen to be placed by fortune in a stratum of society above the average height—of the ladybird insulting her coleopterous sister-insect because she was born brown—is not only contemptible in my eyes—it is loathsome; but, at the same time, I think that those mixed gatherings, instituted with the praiseworthy intention of 'bringing employers and employed together,' and 'making superiors and inferiors better acquainted with one another,' and so on, are, as entertainments, the most utter failures. It is possible that their consequences may be wholesome (which may be also remarked of rhubarb and magnesia), but in themselves, and while in process of occurrence, they are most unpleasant for both parties. Master and Missis are welcome in the servants-hall, of course; their entertainment is a subject for congratulation to its inmates for weeks to come; but I shrewdly suspect that the cook and the butler, and the rest of them, feel much relieved when the visit is over. Just as if Master and Missis had to entertain some royal Duke, they also, while duly estimating the honour, would *privately* thank their stars when they had got well rid of his Serene Magnificence.

However, the supper in question was to be, and could not be obviated by the most philosophic reflections. We had an early dinner, to which—such is the adaptability of our systems to the force of circumstances—I did more ample justice than mere lunch could ever have extorted; then there was a slight refectation called kettle-drum—for when one can take no exercise, a generous diet is absolutely necessary—and at eight o'clock precisely, the great house-bell sounded, and we repaired to the servants-hall.

Tom, at my especial request, gave his arm to his wife (for I felt, with reason, that I was an interloper, and had better keep in the background), and the whole company, already seated, rose to greet them as they entered.

It was as pretty a scene as I had ever beheld in a play, with a look of comfortable reality added,

such as no stage could offer. The spacious room was charmingly decorated with evergreens, procured by the adventurous gardener (his health was subsequently drunk with all the honours), at the risk of being snow-smothered. The well-laden board did not groan in the orthodox fashion, only because it was made of sterner stuff than lord mayors' tables—from its heart of oak no groan could stoutest sirloin, weightiest baron ring. Oak, too, were the walls and ceiling, stone the floor. The whole affair was so far Feudal in its character; but there was no sitting above or below the salt. Tom took his seat at one end of the table, with the cook upon his right; Mrs Clevedon sat at the other; and I had the honour of being placed next to her, and opposite Glassford (here I noticed Mr Glassford) the butler; he was the only person present in complete evening-dress, and from him there seemed to emanate throughout the repast a solemn (although highly gentlemanlike) gloom.

The most brilliant toilet amongst the gentler sex was, without doubt, that of Mrs Antray (on ordinary occasions, Martha, the cook), who had managed to enlist into her service every hue of the rainbow, as well as the novelties introduced since that old Beau's time, such as mauve and magenta. Her proportions were far too ample to admit of her being likened to a butterfly; but there was a certain resemblance between her and one of those gorgeous moths which yet do not sacrifice substance to colour, such as in this country are only seen in glass cases, with a pin stuck through the centre of their bodies: a stomacher, in the form of an enormous Cairngorm brooch, occupied, in the case of Mrs Antray, the place of the head of this pin. But although Art had done so much for this lady, Nature, as often happens, had excelled it. Nothing that she had about her could vie in brilliancy of hue with her complexion: moreover (which is better than Rubies), she wore on this occasion the most radiant expression of countenance it is possible to imagine; and Mrs Clevedon informed me privately (without a trace of jealous feeling) that this was owing to her being next to Master, who was a prime favourite of hers.

Now, if I was to go on in this way, and proceed minutely to describe the upper-housemaid and (not to speak invidiously) the under; if I suffered myself to glance at any length in words, as I ventured respectfully to do with my eyes at the still-room maid (from a feeling of curiosity as to what were her professional duties); if, in short, I were to linger over every flower after this tempting fashion, my narrative would sink to the level of a mere Book of Beauty and Costumes. Let it suffice, then, that round that table were modest faces, fair as the fairest in Mayfair, belonging to the various angels of the house, of the peculiar mission of each of whom I was informed by my hostess; some faces too, of course, not equally charming; some downright gross and vulgar, such as one sees, and not in less proportion, at every dinner-party in good society. As for the men, the butler might very well have sat, with the substitution of the apron he sometimes wore in the cellar for one of another sort, for a typical portrait of my Lord Bishop; the valet looked every inch the (gentleman's) gentleman that he was, though, perhaps, he had a little too much of the 'grand air'; the coachman had all the gravity (and I doubt not, the discretion) of a Cabinet Minister; the gardener (Scotch) looked every inch a professor of

political economy (with the air, when his health was drunk, of one who had been recently knighted); and the groom might easily have been taken for any member of the aristocracy whose tastes were horsey.

The page alone could not have been torn, hazardous, from any portion of the great book of human life; but even he was no exception to the truth that the Tailor makes the man, and the Strike (i.e., the want of him) the fellow; it was plain that the buttons did it. The Prince Imperial, though every lineament bore the Napoleonic impress as markedly as flatterers have contended, would be a page and nothing more in that disguise. The noblest ancestry could never make itself apparent; the highest birth, the bluest blood, would go for naught if ornamented by three rows of buttons.

Amid the clatter of the knives, I ventured to make some observations to this effect to my hostess, and rather to my surprise, they met with her assent. A woman almost always entertains the delusion that there is an upper and lower class type of countenance (independent of what care, and plenty, and authority, with their contraries, can effect in the human face divine), and when she meets a handsome Lord, it is ten to one she remarks to herself that 'there certainly is something about your aristocrat' not to be found in common faces. She has too much reverence, or not enough imagination, to picture him with a bad hat.

But Mrs Clevedon had none of the weakness of her sex in this respect. 'I am the last person, Mr Granby,' said she, 'to believe that nature has any hand in social distinctions.'

'And yet you are a Dacre, are you not?'

'I believe so,' returned she coolly. 'It had to be proved in a very strange way, however. Nature could not have done it for me.'

'I should like to hear that story, Mrs Clevedon.'

'Perhaps you may, some day,' said she smiling. 'It is no particular secret; and although strange, not stranger, I daresay, than the stories of some of these good people here present. Everybody, rich or poor, has probably a biography, or, at all events, an experience, as interesting as yours or mine. I have often thought what an admirable volume could be made out of the *Annals of a Household*—the individual life-histories of all persons under one roof, from the mistress to the scullery-maid, from the master to the man that cleans the knives! But there, I must not talk to you any more, and you must resume your flirtation with my upper-nurse.'

This conversation was carried on at intervals, and without prejudice (as I had flattered myself) to our duty to our neighbours; but so far as I was concerned, at least, I felt, though making the utmost efforts to make myself agreeable to the lady in question, that I was only making her very uncomfortable. It is so difficult to be sprightly with an elderly female, who answers in monosyllables, and calls you 'sir!'

While the eating and drinking were in their early stage, all went well enough; but as the edge of appetite became dulled, and the music of plate and knife grew fitful instead of continuous, the silence began to make itself oppressively felt. Now and again, indeed, it was broken by some cheery remark from Tom, received with a public rapture at least equal to its merits, but a stillness followed close upon it like parted waters behind the hand, even deeper, as it seemed, and

more difficult to break in upon than before. The page, whose space (to speak delicately) was by no means full, and who was averse to margin, 'made stiller by his knife and fork the inviolable quietness.'

Restraint was hovering over the whole party, and shutting out the sunshine of good-fellowship with its baleful wings, though the viands, a vanquished and diminished host, were now removed, and various mulled drinks, brewed by Mr Glassford, had taken their place on the board.

'There will be no speechifying; Tom does not like it,' remarked Mrs Clevedon, observing, I suppose, that gloomy apprehension sat upon my brow.

'Tom is very wise,' whispered I; 'but this utter silence is even worse than speeches. I know it is my being here that does it. I am the prey of remorse and despair. Tom and I trusted to you to hit upon some plan or pastime. Can't you make them tell those life-stories you were talking about?'

'An excellent thought,' replied Mrs Clevedon; 'but mind, to put it into practice, it will be necessary that I shall be implicitly obeyed. That is agreed, is it? Good.'—Mrs Peach, whispered she to the upper-nurse, 'do you happen to know a story that would be likely to interest this gentleman?'

'Story! Lor bless you, ma'am,' returned my neighbour, unconsciously parodying Canning's 'Knife-grinder,' 'I have none to tell the gentleman except *Puss in Boots*, and such as goes down in the nursery.'

The notion of this lady's telling me the story of *Puss in Boots* so tickled her, and indeed myself, that we broke into a merry peal of laughter, the excessive rarity of which at once attracted general attention.

'Come, what is the joke?' cried Tom, from the other end of the table. 'A laugh like that is like hearing a cork drawn; one wants to taste the liquor.'

'Master won't beat that in a hurry,' observed Mr Glassford, pounding the table with the foot of his wine-glass.

'Eh, but that was a good one that—very,' remarked the gardener, pretending to wipe the tears from his eyes while furtively taking a pinch of snuff; 'and it's true, too, about the liquor.'

'But what is your joke?' reiterated Tom, a little ashamed of these eulogiums.

'Oh, it's only one of our friend's stories,' observed Mrs Clevedon gravely. 'He will tell another equally good, he says, upon two conditions: first, that you will not omit your attentions to the gin-punch; secondly, that when he has finished, he may call upon whom he pleases to amuse the company in a similar manner.'

'But, my dear Mrs Clevedon'—expostulated I.

'Hush! they're drinking your health, Mr Granby,' observed she wickedly. 'It is no use to resist; you had better give up what time you have to composition.'

And sure enough, led by the impulsive Tom, the whole company (delighted to have something to do) had risen, and were facing 'master's friend' with three times three and one cheer more. There was evidently nothing for it but to submit with as good a grace as I could assume; and (buoyed up with the prospect of a great revenge) I began my tale accordingly.

THE GUESTS STORY.

I.

At the public school which imparted to me (for a considerable consideration) some scanty knowledge of Greek, more of Latin, and the very gentlemanly 'Tone' for which it had a patent, one of our chief amusements used to be the Paper-chase. Some fleet-footed youth, carrying a huge bag of white paper cut small, was allowed half-an-hour's start of the rest of us, and we, like hounds, pursued him, not by sight, but by the tracks which he was bound to leave us at reasonable distances, in the shape of a handful of paper-cuttings. We were compelled to follow all his zigzags, even although we might have a shrewd suspicion of the line he had taken; and when he was close pushed, he might give us 'a check'—not too long a one, or else he got his head punched—on which occasions there was a great opportunity for the exhibition of a natural sagacity in making casts which should recover the trail. I was not distinguished for Latin, less for Greek, and I do not feel a sure confidence that I ever acquired the Tone; but this I will say, that, when these checks occurred, Granby *minor* (for I had a big brother at the same school) was the boy they always looked to for first 'giving tongue,' in token of having picked up the lost thread. Then through the hedge, and across the brook, and over the wall, without much consideration for the rights of property, or possible injury to the young corn, we sped; and after a splendid burst, ran in upon our fox just as he took to earth—which was as often as not (in spite of the Tone) a public-house. I have dined at good tables since then, but never enjoyed them—no, not even this banquet here—as I did the cold meat, or even the bread and cheese, of those humble hostelries. I have had many a queer cheque since then, and sought for good paper in the City under quite as difficult circumstances; but I have never known such pleasurable excitement as those paper-chases of my youth afforded. The hounds of those days, if not old and toothless, are short-winded now; the fox (poor fellow) has gone to earth in sober truth; but not only do I keep green the memory of that merry game—I owe to it, as I honestly believe, or, at all events, to the qualities it engendered, my preservation from ruin and disgrace.

As I have already stated, I was not an elder son. My brother inherited a pretty penny, and has been enabled to enjoy his fox-hunting (on horseback, and after a real fox) from that far-back time even until now; but I, with only a few thousand pounds from the mother's side, was obliged to look around me for a livelihood. Possessed of the Greek and Latin and the Tone, it was expected by my family that all professions would be only too glad not only to welcome but to purchase my valuable services; but (although I tried one or two) I did not find this to be the case. And here—though the remark is beside the subject of my story—I cannot help expressing my astonishment at the number of promising lads that were with me at that fashionable seminary who have since found themselves in the like position, and at last have become wine-merchants. What possible advantage can the Tone be to them in that calling? If it had been the *Taste* that was cultivated at so great an expense, and with such gratifying results, I could understand why so many younger sons of excellent families— But, however, to my tale.

Perhaps I myself should have been a wine-merchant, if it had not been for my godfather, a person who had never given me anything beyond a silver spoon in infancy (a poor substitute for that which my brother was born with), and a 'tip' of a sovereign to my nurse, but who all of a sudden settled that I should make an excellent banker, and furnished me

with the money to procure me a small partnership in a certain provincial house. It was not a very magnificent position; but it was better than being a hanger-on at rich men's houses, a poor relation always coming to beg, and dismissed each time with the money indeed, but with less and less of ceremony.

After I had been junior partner—which is a very different thing from a sleeping one—for several months, and had learned my duties thoroughly, I was appointed sole manager of a new but promising branch of our main business, in a large county-town, which I will call Millsome. My staff was a very limited one, consisting, besides the servants, of only two clerks, father and son, the former of whom had been in the employment of the firm for thirty years; the latter, a young man of about nineteen. Thanks to the existence of my big brother (although scarcely thanks to him), I was received into very good county society, such as one in my position could scarcely have aspired to; and having been accustomed to a life of pleasure, I did not hesitate to take advantage of all invitations which did not absolutely interfere with my work. I felt that I could trust old Grubb implicitly; and my confidence was not misplaced. But I had not the same high opinion of Master Richard, his son, who, I had discovered, was addicted to little extravagances, late hours, and the illicit use of a latch-key. I had not told his father, for having been somewhat 'fast' in my own youth, I was inclined to leniency upon such points, but I had read a proclamation against vice and immorality to the young man, and he was, in a manner, upon his trial. What in an undergraduate at Cambridge is mere wilfulness, may, in a banker's clerk, be the parent of crime, and therefore, for his own sake (as well as the bank's), I did not mince matters. It was understood between us, that upon the next proved occasion of gross 'unsteadiness,' Master Richard would lose his post.

It was about two months after this rebuke that old Grubb was suddenly sent for to our main establishment, to elucidate some statement of accounts. I was engaged to spend that day at a certain country-house, where I had also agreed to sleep, and I had some misgivings about leaving the bank in charge of that wayward lad, but as it so happened, there was but little money in the strong-box, and since it was not a market-day, it was unlikely that much would be lodged within the next half-a-dozen business hours. I enjoyed my day's shooting, therefore, according to the original programme, and was fully prepared to enjoy the feast that was to follow:

A gathering of the Tory,
A dinner, and then a dance,
For the maids and marriage-makers—
When a circumstance occurred
Which, for me, quenched all this glory.

One of the first guests that made his appearance in the drawing-room happened to be a bluff country squire of my acquaintance. 'Hullo!' cried he laughing, 'you here, Granby! I am very sorry to see you. I had pictured you to myself sitting upon your iron bank-chest, armed to the teeth, and guarding my ten thousand pounds with drawn sword and cocked revolver.'

'Your ten thousand pounds?' said I in astonishment.

'Yes, sir. The purchase-money of the farm at Millsome. I could not resist such a bait as that, although I have often said I could never sell the old place. I paid in the money not three hours ago; and I think it shews an immense confidence in you, in these days of panic, to let you have the fingering of such a sum, although it will not be for many days. My broker tells me that there's an excellent opportunity for investment just now in Indian railways.' And off he went upon that topic, as an ignorant man, who has been just primed upon one subject, does go

off; while I, pretending to be all attention, felt myself stiffening into stone with the thought of all that money being at the mercy of Mr Grubb, junior, who had once had a latch-key made for his private use to fit the bank-door.

My appetite failed so completely after this intelligence, that the French *artiste* might have been my old housekeeper at Millsome, for any appreciation I had for his dishes; while my spirits sank from their high level to such a point that even my good-tempered host could not refrain from remarking upon them. 'Why, Granby,' said he, when the last guest was gone, and we found ourselves in the cozy smoking-room, 'what on earth has come to you since the morning? My wife quite counted upon you for making the party go off cheerily, instead of which you have played the part of a wet-blanket.'

'I am very sorry,' said I humbly; 'I can only plead guilty to the charge, and throw myself on the mercy of the court;' and thereupon I told him the cause of all my trouble.

'My dear fellow,' said he, when I had finished, 'we have been friends too many years for either of us to stand on ceremony. You know we shall be sorry to lose you, but, on the other hand, I am not selfish enough to wish you to stay against your will. It is for you to measure the risk you run by remaining here; but if I were in your place—that is, thirty years younger than I am, and with my bread to make—I should sleep to-night at Millsome, even if I had to walk the whole ten miles. I can send you in the dog-cart, however, and the old mare will spin you over within the hour. It is not twelve yet, and the trap shall be at the door in ten minutes. I was your father's friend, and I advise you as I think he would do were he alive.'

'You are right,' said I: 'your proposal quite agrees with my own sense of duty; and I thank you very much.'

So, within the quarter of an hour I was on my road home, behind the swift-trotting old bay, and yet with a sense that I ought to be flying, and a presentiment that I was too late.

Of course, when I arrived at Millsome, all the town was asleep, including my housekeeper, and I rang the bank-bell a dozen times before I roused her. At last she came, shivering and grumbling, and a 'Lor, who would ha' thought o' seein' you, *Muster* Granby!'

'Are you all right at home?' inquired I nervously. 'Where is Mr Richard?'

'In bed and asleep, sir, I don't doubt; and fast asleep too, or he'd a heerd the bell, and come down to save my old limbs, for he's a kind lad.'

That was true: and Mr Richard's good looks and pleasant manners had made such way with the good dame, that she habitually spoiled him; cooked him titbits for supper, and sat up for him until morning, on those rare occasions when he had leave from his father, who was a strict disciplinarian, to stay out.

'You are quite sure he is in?' said I, as I stood in the hall, hesitating as to whether I should go up and see for myself, and somewhat repenting of my suspicions and precipitancy.

'O yes; he went to his room very early—before nine o'clock: he had a headache, poor lad, and bade me not to disturb him.—You won't wake him, please, sir, unless it's anything very particular.'

I did not like the notion of these early hours in my young gentleman at all, and ran up to his room at once, taking three steps at a time. His door was fastened, and there was no reply to my repeated summons. With a kick, that I had been famous for at school, and with which I had burst many a 'study'-door in, whose too diligent tenant had ventured to refuse me admittance, I sent the timber flying, and found myself in Mr Grubb junior's apartment. The bird was flown. The bed had not even been slept in.

His sudden indisposition had been only a device to conceal his departure, which had probably taken place before the housekeeper had fastened the place up for the night. I went down to the strong-room, without much hope indeed, but to make certain that my fears were well founded before taking further steps. If the ten thousand pounds' worth of notes—for the purchase-money, the squire had informed me, had been all paid in notes of the Bank of England—were not in the iron chest, where it was Richard's duty to have placed them, then my worst suspicions would be realised, and the firm had been robbed. Not a note was there. The young scoundrel had made off with the whole of that enormous booty.

II.

Here was a position! What would my partners have to say to me, through whose culpable neglect they had experienced so serious a loss? How could I ever repay them—how make amends for so gigantic a calamity? For a few moments, despair seemed utterly to take possession of me. I saw my new-born hopes of making my own way in the world utterly blighted. I was a wine-merchant already, soliciting small orders. I should pass my old age in an almshouse for decayed gentlemen, who had in vain acquired 'the Tone' at a fashionable public school.

But my mind, naturally elastic, did not suffer itself to be thus depressed for long. Because I had been a fool, was I also to be a sluggard in making reparation for my folly? No. My partners should at least be obliged to confess that, however careless had been my conduct in permitting the mischief, I was not deficient in energy in repairing it. If Mr Richard Grubb was upon the face of the earth, I registered a solemn vow that I would find him.

But how to begin? That was the question. I knew nothing, absolutely nothing to start with, except that the man was gone, and the money with him. The money? If I did but know the numbers of the notes, or could get to know them, before the Bank of England opened its doors that day (it was already past one o'clock A.M.), they could be stopped by a telegraphic message, and the disposal of them at all events made difficult. The squire who had paid them in lived but five miles off, and it was probable that himself or his lawyer would be able to afford me so much information. I had already seized my hat, when a sudden thought made me turn my steps into the counting-house. Unless the young scamp had resolved to steal this money upon the instant that he handled it, he would have booked the numbers in the usual way, and I should find them in the entry-book. And there they were, sure enough. It must have taken him an hour to set them down. There were fifty one-hundred pound notes, fifty fifties, fifty tens, and four hundred fives. What an idiot he must have been not to have torn out that damning record! True, he was well convinced that I should not return home until near mid-day, and long after he had realised his ill-gotten gains; but old Grubb, his father, was to be back to breakfast in time for the opening of the bank, and finding his son fled, what more likely than that the astute old man should suspect something wrong, examine the entry-book, compare it with the contents of the cash-box, and telegraph at once to Town. The omission, however, was characteristic of the young man; a creature of impulse, incapable of any deep-laid scheme, and who was at that moment, perhaps, regretting the perilous step he had taken, and wishing all undone that had been done. That such was the nature of Richard Grubb, I felt convinced, and upon that conviction acted during the whole of the pursuit which engaged me for the next three weeks. Perhaps, if he had been a more resolute man, he would have eluded me. I may be permitted to add, however, that not everybody—nor every professional

detective, as will be seen—would have caught even Mr Richard Grubb. It was a paper-chase of the most exciting sort, and Granby *minor*, as he flatters himself, did no discredit to the reputation of his boyhood.

My first steps were turned, of course, to the railway station, where the face of the absconded youth might, I hoped, be not unknown to the booking-clerk. That official, naturally enough, had taken himself home directly after the departure of the mail, but the night-porter was fortunately able to give me the necessary information. Richard Grubb had started from Millsome by the last train, which, with the exception of one junction station, stopped nowhere on its way to Town. There had been but three passengers, and they had all booked for London. But had they all gone thither? I telegraphed to the terminus for the number of Millsome tickets received there by the mail, and found that they tallied with the number booked. My fox was therefore in London: a large cover enough, indeed, but still it was something to have ascertained even that much. It was the first trace of the bagged paper. Next I telegraphed to a man upon whom I could rely to stop the stolen notes at the Bank of England, waited for his answer, and then went home to bed with a little less perturbation of spirit than I had known for the last three hours.

By the first train in the morning I hurried to Town, and 'put myself into communication,' as the phrase goes—circumlocutory, and therefore appropriate enough—with the authorities in Scotland Yard. I procured the services of what is always termed by courtesy 'an active and intelligent detective,' and fondly imagined that the object of my mission was already half attained. Never was man more mistaken. That worthy officer—who did not attach himself to me for nothing, you may be sure—was not a whit more skilful in looking for a needle in a bottle of hay than myself, and I should have done just as well without him. As I had fully expected, no attempt was made to change the stolen notes at the bank that day. Grubb, junior, even although he had no reason to suspect that they were already stopped, had probably not had the courage to effect that *coup* in person, and knew nobody whom he could trust to do it for him. I felt convinced that his intention was to go abroad with his plunder. In the meantime, we did what we could. From what I knew of his tastes, I thought it likely he would begin to enjoy himself after his fashion, 'and see life' as it exhibited itself in Town during the small-hours. Mr Inspector Lynx and myself saw a great deal of it ourselves during that week, and mixed with some very queer company, but without coming upon the young gentleman we sought. At the end of that period came a letter from poor old Grubb—the second, by the by, I had received from him: the first would have melted a stone, so grieved and sorrowful was the honest creature at the delinquency of his scape-grace offspring—and this communication gave us our first clue. It enclosed a note from the lad himself, expressing some regret for the step he had committed, but at the same time a resolution to keep what he had got. 'It is too late now,' he said. 'By the time you get this, I shall be far away, and you will never see me again.' The letter purported to be written from the *Brazen Cross Hotel*, but that address was in the young man's own handwriting, the printed address at the top of the sheet having been most carefully erased. The post-mark, too, shewed a different postal district than that in which the inn in question was situated. However, we went at once to the *Brazen Cross*, and found that the young man had really been there—he was a singularly handsome youth, and easily described and recognised—but that he had only remained there two nights; the first two he had passed in Town. We spent hours poring over his note, and endeavouring to decipher

the crossed-out words without success: the stamped address outside the envelope—how characteristic it was of the thoughtless lad to have omitted to use a plain one—had been rendered equally illegible. All on a sudden, I caught a glimpse of dropped paper. 'Mr Lynx,' cried I, 'we are a couple of idiots. Here is the name of the envelope-maker. Surely we ought to have gone to him at once.'

Mr Inspector (doubtless because the suggestion ought to have emanated from himself) did not like this remark, and affected to see nothing in it. To the envelope-maker's, however, I insisted upon going, and he at once recognised his own handiwork. That envelope, he said, had been one of five thousand made by him for the *Oriental and Occidental Hotel Company* (Limited). He would take his Bible oath of that.

Mr Inspector shook his head, a movement, by the by, on which, as indicative of sagacious incredulity, he greatly prided himself.

'Well, there may be something in it,' quoth he reluctantly; 'we should never say die.'

'And yet it was "die" as did it,' observed the envelope-maker promptly; whereupon Mr Inspector shook his head in quite an appalling manner, as though a liberty had been taken with the majesty of the law.

We were not long in reaching the *Oriental and Occidental Hotel*, which was close to a railway terminus. At first, our inquiries only elicited that there was such an enormous custom, and so many changing faces [the place failed in about two months after this], that any recollection of an individual from description was out of the question. But from the manager and the head-waiter, I appealed to a very pretty chambermaid, who passed us as we were in consultation, and she recognised my description of Master Richard Grubb without the smallest difficulty.

'You are not going to do him any harm, sir, I hope?' asked she suddenly, in the midst of cross-examination.

'He has run away from his friends, my good girl,' said I, 'and his poor father is broken-hearted about him.'

'Well,' said she, blushing, 'if that is really the case'—

'Yes,' interrupted I, seeing her fingers irresolutely playing with a chain about her neck, 'you'll lend us the photograph he gave you, will you not?'

And with that she took it off upon the spot, detaching it from the handsome gold chain, to purchase which I am very sure that at least one of those ten-pound notes had been changed, and placed it in my hand. The impressionable Richard was likely to spend a good deal of the money after this fashion, but I did not at all regret his extravagance in the present instance. Thanks to his foolish vanity, I was now provided with a touchstone, by which in a moment I could discover whether he had been seen or not by any person to whom I shewed it. For the rest, the intelligence I gained was far from assuring; the young gentleman had departed two days before by a certain afternoon train to Dover, doubtless on his way to the continent, which I had apprehended would be his destination from the first.

'What are we to do now, Mr Inspector?' inquired I, though, I must confess, without much hope of any useful suggestion.

'Well, sir,' replied that official, with his Lord Burleigh shake, 'what I always says when a case comes to a point like this—when a thread breaks short off, as it were, and you've only got the wrong end in your hand: "Next to winning is to know when you're beat." And it's my opinion that we're beat here, and dead beat.'

'What!' cried I, tapping the photograph, 'do you mean to say that, just after having obtained such a link as this [I didn't take the poor girl's chain from her], that you would counsel our giving up the paper-chase?'

'Paper-chase!' answered he sardonically; 'it's a wild-goose chase, sir, and nothing less. With nothin' to go upon except that pictur, I decline to risk my professional reputation on a tour in foreign parts.'

'You are wrong there,' said I, in a white-heat in the passion; 'for the more you risk it, the better chance you will have of getting rid of such a rotten commodity!'

Mr Inspector (who, I will say for him, was imperturbable as to temper) only sublimely shook his head, and wished me a very good-day and the best of luck; and thus ended my connection with Scotland Yard. From that moment, I determined to be my own detective.

III.

The task before me was now become more difficult than ever. Although Mr Lynx had been of no sort of use to me, I knew that I should feel the absence of a companion with a common object in view. I should now have no one to confer with, nay, possibly no one to talk to, for I could speak no language but my own. The acquisition in early life of Greek, Latin, and the Tone—how different if it were the French accent!—does not at all facilitate travelling on the continent. On the other hand, I conjectured, and rightly, that Mr Richard Grubb was no better provided in this respect than I; and the fact that 'birds of a feather flock together'—never more apparent than in the case of helpless English when abroad—gave me hope that he and I should yet meet under the same roof before any great portion of those ten thousand pounds should have melted away. 'Abroad,' too, I felt confident, would with him mean Paris, although I omitted no inquiry to render that supposition a certainty. The train by which my fox had left London did not, I ascertained, meet any continental steamer; it was too late for that; therefore, it followed that he must, at all events, have remained in Dover for that night. Accordingly, I booked myself, in the first place, for that port. Upon my way down, the helplessness of my expedition and the derision of Mr Inspector made my heart very heavy, and again and again I pulled out the photograph, and solaced myself with the sight of that—the only straw to which I had to cling. A motherly—but slightly imaginative—old lady, who was in the same carriage, was moved to tears by this touching proceeding, and observed to me in pitiful accents: 'I see, sir, you, like me, have loved and lost. It cannot be your son, I think. Am I wrong in supposing the young man to have been your younger brother?'

'Madam,' said I, 'this is the portrait of one in whom I feel a far greater interest than any man, from Cain to the present day, ever entertained for a younger brother.'

'He is not really lost, you know,' returned she cheerfully; 'he is only gone before.'

'I am very glad to hear you say so,' said I quietly. 'But seventy-two hours, let me tell you, is a tremendous start in a paper-chase.'

The old lady made no further observations, and changed her carriage at the next station, rather hurriedly. My impression is, she thought I was mad. At Dover—imitating as best I could my fox's probable proceedings—I drove to the nearest hotel, and having secured a room, commenced my inquiries.

No such young man had arrived at his house, said the landlord; but it might be worth my while to inquire a few doors off, where there was an inn kept by his son-in-law. I did so, and found I was on the right scent. Mr Richard Grubb had slept at *The Shepherd's Bush* on the night in question, and had left by the morning boat, bound, as he had given out, for Paris.

Foreign travel, to one who is unable to speak the language of the country in which he journeys, is, after the first freshness has worn off, exceedingly

tedious work. There are indeed persons who like it, as there are those who will pay money to sit still, and watch the scenes of a strange panorama unfold themselves to the monotonous patter of a showman; but even they, without the showman, would drop off gorged with the eye-feast, after two or three hundred yards of it. Such expeditions, so far from 'opening the mind,' as they are supposed to do, only dull and daze it. They instruct no more than the shifting landscapes of a dream. Magnificent natural scenery, indeed, has a universal tongue, but towns, inhabited by folks of alien speech, are desperately wearisome. And it was in a town I well knew, if anywhere, that I should find Richard Grubb. A young man who has ten thousand stolen pounds in his pocket does not incline to pastoral pleasures, and the occupancy of a chalet in the Alps; he does not appreciate Nature so much as *cafés chantants*, casinos, and the *bal mobile*. I had been abroad once or twice already, and even with intelligent English companions had not much enjoyed myself, and been a good deal bored. My expectations, therefore, during the intervals of seasickness, as I crossed the Channel on the present occasion, were not of an agreeable kind. Yet this time, when I was not seeking mere pleasure, I really think that I more nearly attained to it than I had ever done before. The importance of the object I had in view dwarfed all inconveniences, and the excitement of the paper-chase forbade ennui. When there was no scent, I was rapt in making casts; and when I had found the trail, off I flew with nose to ground, as careless of the country through which I passed as any sleuth-hound. A very different sort of tour was mine from that which Englishmen abroad are wont to take. I did not dazzle myself with picture-galleries, nor accumulate mildew in those fine old churches (all so very much alike), nor tire my legs with miles of corridors in uncomfortable palaces, nor did I exhaust my small vocabulary (notwithstanding that my one cry was 'Grubb') in demanding novelties in the way of food. I knew that the young gentleman of whom I was in search would do none of these things, and I strove to shape my conduct by his own. It was fortunate for my purpose in this respect that he and I were similarly situated—each ignorant and speechless in an alien land. What it occurred to me to do, would probably have occurred to him. Thus, on the road to Paris, I determined, upon my arrival in that city, to be driven, as at Dover, to the nearest inn. For even if my fox had been recommended, while in London, to patronise any particular hotel, it was probable, foolish as he was, that he would have the wits to avoid it. It so happened, however, that in the immediate vicinity of the Paris terminus there were seven hotels, each of which was about as near to it as the other, and as I could not put up at them all, I was obliged to make my choice of one of them. I had purchased a French vocabulary at Dover, which would have taught me to speak French about as well as Mr Inspector Lynx had taught me the art of detection (it was chiefly devoted to drinking: 'Which do you prefer? Noyeau, Vanille, or Curacao? &c.); but during the twelve hours it had been in my possession, I had picked out of the intolerable amount of sack a few half-pennyworths of useful bread—one or two questions adapted to my present need. By disregarding what was superfluous in these inquiries, and combining what was suitable to my purpose, I ingeniously constructed for myself the sentence, 'Have you seen my brother lately?' and with that and the photograph, I was prepared, like A Becket's wife of old, to perambulate all Europe in search of the desired object.

I deposited my luggage (if I may so denominate one little carpet-bag, with an elaborate lock, for the safe-keeping of those notes, if I should ever regain possession of them), and under pretence of ordering dinner, at once obtained audience of the head-waiter.

I suppose my accent must have betrayed me, for the person addressed smiled benignly, and answered with a polite bow: 'Sar, I do speak Inglesse.' If he did, I had certainly all my life been talking something else than my own mother-tongue; but it was not my place to contradict him. On the contrary, calling to mind what I had heard of the vanity of the French, I congratulated this individual upon his colloquial powers, ordered an expensive dinner for myself, and gave him a cigar made of a substance entirely unknown, as I have reason to believe, to a French waiter—namely, genuine tobacco. Upon this, we became such fast friends, that I had some subsequent trouble to get rid of him, so desirous was he to be my guide, philosopher, and friend in a tour of the capital of the world (as he entitled Paris), after his business hours should be concluded. But the worst of it was that he had not seen my brother, although he expressed a polite wish to do so, and protested he could 'recognise the likeness to Monsieur.' Foiled in my first attempt, I was in nowise discouraged; on the contrary, I felt that the sphere of my search was already growing limited, for if all garçons were like this garçon, it was among them, or at least from information which such would furnish, that I was most likely to find my fox. They would be attractive to him, since they spoke 'Inglesse;' but if they exhibited to him Paris after nightfall, they would be irresistible.

I strolled into the coffee-room of the hotel next door, and ordering a cup of coffee, addressed my newly acquired shibboleth to the man that brought it:

Avez-vous dernièrement vu mon frère?

No. He had seen nobody at all like that good-looking young gentleman. The barmaid was equally certain; if she had seen Monsieur's brother, it would have been quite impossible to forget him. It was funny enough that these good folks should endeavour to please me by praising the fellow who had done me more mischief than any other living man.

At the third hotel, into which I entered under pretence of wanting a *petit verre* (my vocabulary affording me endless excuses of that sort), I asked to see the visitors' list. It struck me that it was by no means improbable that Mr Richard Grubb would still retain his own name, from sheer want of imagination to invent another. It was not, however, in the category of Distinguished Persons who had lately patronised the *Hôtel de Fleuris*. But my own name was there, both front-name (as poor Artemus Ward used to call it) and surname, and their appearance astonished me not a little. Of course there might be more than one Robert Granby in the world, but still the coincidence was striking; and pointing to the entry in question, which was in a handwriting quite unknown to me, I asked whether that gentleman was still in the house. No. The young banker—did I know him?—had departed only last night for Geneva, with his two friends, Monsieur Joan and Monsieur Smit, whose names were bracketed with his own.

'Banker?' said I. 'Then this is his portrait, is it not?' and I pulled out the inestimable photograph.

Yes, indeed. That was the young banker Inglesse himself, although by no means a flattering likeness. Monsieur was evidently a relative. My nephew—ah, my brother, was it?—well, he was a fine free-handed young gentleman; so young, and yet so rich; and of such pleasant manners, that it was quite a pleasure to serve him.

Charmed with this praise of my fascinating young kinsman, I gave the waiter a five-franc piece, and learned from him straightway all I wished to know—and more.

Mr Richard Grubb had patronised this establishment for the whole of his short Parisian visit, and, thanks to my informant, seemed to have seen a good deal of town-life within the first twenty-four hours.

After that time, Messieurs Joan and Smit, his countrymen, and also voyagers for pleasure, had made his acquaintance, and taken him to themselves. The three had certainly taken the train together for Geneva, but for what hotel they had not stated.

Of course I was much interested to know what sort of gentry these might be, but here Pierre (my brother had already got to call him by his Christian name, he said) could not assist me. Whether they were dangerous associates for the young man, or mere tourists, as they described themselves to be, I could not discover. It was easy to see, indeed, that Pierre did not like them; but that might follow from their having taken so plump a pigeon out of his itching hands. Yet, if they were really rogues, how vastly greater would be the opportunity afforded for getting rid of the stolen notes! Although I had found the trail, and the scent was fresh, and, as it were, breast-high, I had never felt more despondent of final success than when I took my railway ticket the next morning for Geneva. I had no longer only to deal with one with whose nature I was acquainted, and whose course of conduct I could almost predict, but with total strangers. One thing only comforted me: they had not, when they left Paris, been put in possession of the lad's secret: otherwise, neither of them would have written Robert Granby's name in the visitors' book, far less have coupled it with their own. He had certainly deceived them up to that time. It was doubtless indiscreet of him to have assumed my name, but not so much so as it had appeared at the first glance. It was a bold stroke—bolder than I had dreamed him capable of—to personate the very man he had robbed; but there were considerable advantages about it. It saved him a great deal of deception, and the necessity for making a world of false statements tally with one another. His assumed trade of banker accounted for his possession of a large sum of money, and his knowledge of my affairs enabled him to reply plausibly to all unpleasant questions. He would probably, however, not have volunteered information of any kind, and the placing his name in the visitors' list had been an unfortunate accident, caused, perhaps, by the vanity of Monsieur Smit or Joan, proud of travelling in company with such a young millionaire. It was thus I accounted to myself for what had happened, as I flew along through hill and over valley, in sunlight or gloom. By city or ruin, past factory or fortress, by winding river or treeless plain; it was all one to me. I ate, but not for appetite; I slept—no, in vain I tried to sleep; so soon as I closed my eyes, the numbers of those stolen notes came sliding in upon the retina, and my tongue involuntarily repeated them one by one. If I had been another hour on the journey, I verily believe that I should have gone mad.

Arrived at Geneva, I suffered myself to be taken possession of by the first hotel tout that offered. It was no longer of any use to calculate upon what my fox would have done. At the *Four Seasons* I secured a bed, and then, as usual, the ear of the head-waiter. Of Monsieur Granby he never had had the happiness of hearing, but three gentlemen had arrived the previous day—of one of whom the photograph I produced was certainly the portrait—and being dissatisfied with the accommodation afforded (the young gentleman in question was a *milord*, he said, and very particular about the situation of his apartments), had taken themselves off elsewhere.—No, he knew not whither; for there were inns and inns at Geneva; but he would answer for it that the young *milord* would be disappointed in getting better rooms than those which had been offered to him at the *Four Seasons*. Heavens! would Monsieur see these apartments that had been rejected, though once occupied by a Serene Highness?

This was good news thus far. Messrs Jones and Smith—for in this fastidiousness I did not recognise

Mr Grubb at all—were evidently no rogues, but only Snobs. For the first time since I parted with Mr Inspector Lynx, I now 'put myself into communication' with the police; and armed with a warrant, or the Swiss equivalent to it, for the apprehension of my young scapegrace, and attended by a gendarme in plain clothes, I proceeded to explore the town. There are not many first-class inns, suitable for a great man's lodging, in Geneva, and at the third hotel we visited, we found my three gentlemen located.

The young *milord* and Monsieur Smit were not at present within doors; but Monsieur Joan, yes, he was in the coffee-room at that moment. Ordering some slight refreshment, we seated ourselves accordingly in that apartment, at the next table to the individual in question—a loud-talking, vulgar young fellow, but one, to all appearance, with no worse faults about him than the want of wits and good-manners. He was boasting to a fellow-countryman, who sat near him, of the wealth and good connections of his friend Granby, with whom he was travelling, and detailing their common plans with the most engaging frankness. They had had already enough, he said, of Switzerland, where there was nothing like life to be seen, and were about to make a tour in Italy. His two friends had just gone to the railway station to make inquiries, and he wondered why they had not already returned.

How sick at heart I felt when I heard those words! Perhaps the young scoundrel whom I sought had caught sight of my face unknown to me, and was already far away. But there was nothing for it but to wait and watch. In the meantime, I had the pleasure of listening to what was in substance my own biography, as narrated with embellishments by Mr Jones. I had previously no idea of how distinguished an individual I really was. The scion of a noble race, and educated under the most aristocratic auspices, I had nevertheless stooped to commercial pursuits, and made for myself at one-and-twenty a gigantic fortune. In the middle of a highly flattering description of the respectable firm to which I had the honour to belong, and which was represented as superior in credit to Barings, my fox and Mr Smith walked into the saloon.

I should scarcely have recognised my young friend, he was so exceedingly well dressed, and had such an air of fashion; but Mr Richard Grubb recognised me on the instant, and his handsome face turned from red to green with the rapidity and permanence of a railway danger-signal.

I rose and advanced towards him. He made one wretched effort to misunderstand me, to affect that I was under a mistake as to his identity, and then fainted away. That night, he was accommodated by my companion with a cell at the police-office, in place of the handsomely furnished apartment which had been so fortunate as to receive his approbation. Upon searching his effects, which comprehended a very fashionable wardrobe, two new portmanteaus and a hat-box, and a dressing-case with silver-gilt fittings, I discovered the whole of the stolen notes, save one hundred and fifty pounds, which considerable sum he had contrived to get rid of in less than a fortnight. However, I was thankful enough to find matters no worse; and somewhat relenting, nay, not altogether without pity for his fallen fortunes, I next day took the lad out of jail, and lodged him at the *Four Seasons*. He no longer despised the accommodation there afforded to him, and I was not so ungenerous as to disclose the real state of affairs to those who had known him in his short-lived prosperity. I gave out that he was a very delicate boy, and that I was his guardian, who had just rescued him from certain undesirable acquaintances. He sat by my side at the table-d'hôte, and the waiters would never help him until I had satisfied them

that the dish was wholesome for him. Poor wretch, he looked pale and ill enough to have been almost on the point of death! And so, locking him in his chamber every night, wherever we put up, and never leaving his side by day, I brought the lad home to his afflicted father. For the latter's sake, we did not prosecute the misguided youth; and indeed having been his close companion—although an involuntary one—for nearly a week, I should hardly have liked to have got in the witness-box to swear away his liberty, perhaps for life.

Nor, I am glad to say, was this clemency misplaced. Grubb, junior, has emigrated to the antipodes, where his conduct promises to be the antipodes of what it was at Millsome. His father is still with us, bound to us more than ever, in that we spared his only son from ruin. The firm prospers—albeit it has not yet reached the eminence ascribed to it by Monsieur Joan—and that, though still junior partner, my opinion carries no small weight with it, is owing chiefly, I am told, to the perseverance and sagacity with which I conducted that singular paper-chase, and eventually ran down the Fox.

A drumming on the table, like the noise of bees swarming, and such notes of admiration as 'Well, I never!' and 'It's as good as a story-book,' touched my trembling ears as I hid my face in the punch-steam.

'It is now my turn to call upon whom I will to take my place of story-teller,' observed I, refreshed and triumphant.

An awful silence, broken by one low giggle from the still-room maid, succeeded this menace.

'If you value my friendship,' ejaculated Tom in an agony, 'don't call upon me. Confound it, sir'—here he wiped his brow with his handkerchief—'it would be derogatory to my dignity.'

'Well, then, I call upon Mrs Clevedon; I am sure she is not too proud to entertain us.'

Perhaps my demand was not wholly unexpected; perhaps she really wished to set folks right upon a subject about which rumour had been very busy, and was, as usual, wrong; at all events, without a moment of hesitation, and in clear collected tones, she began as follows:

THE MISTRESS'S STORY.

If I am proud, it must be indeed to my discredit, since I was once a workhouse orphan, as my husband here well knows. How I came to be such, is only known to me by hearsay; but I remember the fact distinctly. How I wore the neat but inexpensive livery of the little pauper—a blue print-gown with a white apron, and a white cap like a miniature widow's. (I think I can see myself in it now.) How big the house was, in which I was a unit among many; and how very clean it was; and how it smelled of soup—perhaps not very good soup; and how very gritty and unlike a playground was the yard wherein we played! I recollect all that. I also remember, much more dimly, the Board of Guardians under whose rule the place was. I cannot dissociate their faces from the great table at which they sat in judgment upon my case; but even now I make a picture in my mind of a large unfurnished room, with one bare table and many chairs, and a number of curious ungenial countenances, of which poor little I was the focus. It was not, however, because I was so small that they could not quite make me out; there was a reason that prevented them from disposing of me so summarily as other workhouse orphans, and which caused the chairman to put up his double eye-glasses (how like a beetle he did look, I thought), and examine me from top to toe.

They had been informed, I believe, that, although my father had died in extreme poverty, I was well connected, at least by the mother's side; and that I should not long remain a burden upon the parish.

'I am sure I hope it is so,' said the old beetle gruffly, in answer to some remark upon this subject hazarded by the matron who had introduced me to the Board.—'I am sure I hope so, for all our sakes. By all means, let her friends, if she has any, be communicated with: the rates are heavy enough, goodness knows, already.'

Of course I knew nothing at the time of what it all meant. I was not five years old; and my little heart was swelling, and the tears rolling in silence down my cheeks, with the thought that dear, kind papa was dead, and had been carried away, and put somewhere where I should never see him any more. Of my mother, I had no recollection whatever; she had died soon after my birth (as I afterwards heard), and papa had been all in all to me. A kind and handsome face he had whenever he spoke to his little Annie; but very resolute and fixed when he was thinking, as he often was. The change in his features was so remarkable, that even such a little child as I had observed it, though, of course, at that time, I knew nothing of the cause. He had his talking face and his thinking face, that was all I knew. I had seen both grow thinner and paler for a long time, until at last one morning there was only left his thinking face, sharp as a hatchet, with the eyelids closed, and the brow knitted. I did not like to see him so, but he would not speak nor look at me; and I got frightened, and called the landlady, who gave me bread and butter with brown sugar on it, and put me to bed. That was the only time—the day poor papa died—that she was kind to me, and did not scold. We owed her money for rent—though not for food, else papa's face would not have been so thin—and I daresay the poor soul could not afford to lose it; and I was taken to the workhouse the next morning.

I daresay the life I led there was hard, and the food coarse; but that was nothing to me just then. The grown-up people about me were not unkind, although they could in no way supply the place of him I had lost. The children—orphans like myself—were not my playmates, for I had not the heart to play. Still, after the first day or two, so long as I was let alone, and not spoken to, I ceased to cry, and was glad of what little infant's work was given to me to do.

At the week's end, I was sent for into the matron's room, where sat a strange lady in a black dress, and with her veil down.

'This is the little girl, Annie Gray, about whom you were inquiring,' said the matron.—The lady bowed her head without speaking.—'And Annie,' continued the matron, 'this is some one who is interested in your welfare, who wishes to be very good to you, and knows all your story.'

'Did she know my dear papa?' said I simply.

'Yes,' said the lady gravely; then, throwing up her veil, and opening her arms for me to run into them, she cried: 'Come and kiss me, my darling child.'

'I am not your child,' said I; 'my mamma has been dead a long time; but I went and kissed her, for she had a kind and pleasant face, although she was very old.'

'So like, so like!' murmured the strange lady, taking my face within her hands, and gazing upon it, as if it were a picture.

'Why do you cry?' said I. 'Have you lost your papa, too?'

She did not answer me, but, turning to the matron, observed: 'There is no doubt about the matter at all. If it is convenient, I will take her away with me at once.'

'Just as you please, ma'am,' answered the other. 'There will be something to sign, but no objection will, I am sure, be made. You would like to go and live in a fine house, and be waited upon like a queen, Annie, would you not?'

'Oh, but that will not be the case, ma'am,' interposed the visitor hastily; 'at all events, not at first, and perhaps not at all. What has convinced me, may by no means convince other folks.'

'Ah, I see,' said the matron (although I don't think she did); 'and if you will step into the board-room yonder, mum, where you will find my husband with the book, I will give little missie, here, some cake and wine.' When this was done, and we were left alone together, 'You will not forget Mrs Jones,' said the matron, 'and how kind she always was to you when you were poor and friendless, my dear.'

'You never gave me any cake and wine before, did you, Mrs Jones?' returned I with seriousness.

'No, my love, but I was always ready to give it you.'

Perhaps she spoke the truth; for though, when she went to the cupboard to cut another slice, I heard her say to herself, quite distinctly: 'Drat the brat!' she had a very pleasant smile upon her face, and patted my head, although a little hard—maybe from having been used to printing butter, which was one of her daily occupations.

Then the strange lady came back; and after I had exchanged my workhouse dress for a suit of mourning she had brought with her for that purpose, we went off together in a post-chaise.

'Now, Annie,' said she, as soon as we were rolling away, 'I see you are a sensible child, and if you will attend to what I am going to say, it will be much for your good. I am taking you to a great house, where, at all events, thank God, you will be well taken care of—because I shall have the care of you—but where, if you are an obedient child, and do as I tell you, you may indeed live, as that woman yonder was saying, "like a queen." You may have a carriage to drive about in, and a pony to ride, and pretty clothes to wear, and nice things to eat; but that will not happen just at present, and not at all unless you do as you are bid. You are going to see a relative, of whom, I daresay, you never heard. Well, he was your poor mother's father—your grandpapa—so you must be dutiful and kind to him, for her sake.'

'I never heard of grandpapa,' said I.

'Perhaps not, but he is your grandpapa nevertheless; and you must not mind his being a little hard and stern, for he has not been used to little girls—at least of late years. It will be better, I think, if you called him "Sir," or "Mr Dacre," when you see him first.'

'But if he is my grandpapa, why should not I call him so?' inquired I.

'Because you mean to be a good girl, and to do as you are bid, Annie.'

This determination being taken so very much for granted, I felt obliged to acquiesce in it: otherwise, it puzzled me a good deal; first, why I had never heard of so near a relative before; and secondly, why he did not like being called by his proper title. The idea of my ever having called dear papa 'Sir,' or 'Mr Gray!'

The post-chaise rolled on and on, occasionally stopping a few minutes to change horses, and once, about an hour, for us to get out and dine; after that, I began to feel very drowsy, and presently dropped asleep, and I remember nothing more until I was roused by a strange noise—it was the wheels crunching over gravel—when the old lady said to me, in a trembling voice: 'Wake up, Annie, dear; this is Dacre Hall, your future home, I hope.'

The chaise had stopped before a large mansion, huge as the workhouse, and, like it, of red brick, only not so staring. A great flight of stone steps led up

to the front door, and on either side of them stood a huge beast in stone, with open jaws, and an arrow-headed tongue. Almost as soon as we had stopped, the door opened, and a tall portly gentleman in black came down towards the chaise.

'Is this grandpapa?' whispered I to my companion.

'La, no, my dear,' responded she severely; 'nothing of the kind.—How do you find yourself, Mr Bung?' added she, with dignity.

'Thank you, Mrs Mellon; only so so, as usual. Oh, this is the'—

'Your young lady that is to be,' interposed my companion hastily. 'Lift Miss Annie out, if you please, sir.'

Mr Bung obeyed, but his comfortable features had more of curiosity than respect in them as he put his ponderous arms around me and carried me up the steps.

'Shall I take her into the library?' asked he.

'Certainly not, Mr Bung. I will take her there myself, when we are ready.—Come along with me, Miss Annie.' And with my hand tight-clasped in hers, she led me hurriedly, as though fearing interruption, across the uncarpeted and shining floor of the great hall, and up some broad oak-stairs to a large room full of cupboards, which opened into a smaller one with a tiny bed in it, very neat and white.

'This will be your room, my dear,' said she, 'quite close to the storeroom, which leads into mine; and now let me make you spruce and tidy for your grandpapa.'

There was not much to be done with me beyond what soap and water could effect, for the black dress Mrs Mellon had given me was the only one in my possession, and my hair had been so clipped by the workhouse shears that it admitted of no style of arrangement beyond combing it straight down over the forehead. When she had finished, however, the old lady seemed satisfied with the result; and as she was leading me through a long gallery hung with pictures, stopped in front of one of them, representing a little girl and boy, in velvet dresses, with great falling collars.

'Mercy me, it's as though the child were looking in the looking-glass,' murmured the old lady; but I did not know what she meant at that time. Presently we came to a green baize door, close behind which was another door, at which we knocked; and then a sharp querulous voice cried: 'Come in.'

It was the finest room that ever I had beheld, by far, lined with books, many of them larger than myself, from floor to ceiling; while three tall windows looked forth upon a flower-garden, bright with colour, bordering a noble lawn, beyond which stretched a wooded park, with herds of deer; but at that time I had no eyes for anything, either within or without that room, except for its occupant. A thin, small, weazen old man he was, with snow-white hair and bright beady eyes; but there was a look of authority about him, before which I could see that even my protectress, Mrs Mellon, quailed. He rose from his chair as we entered, and came towards us hastily, tightening the silken rope that held his dressing-gown together, as he moved.

'So this is the child,' said he contemptuously, 'who, I daresay, has befooled you already, Mrs Mellon. Why does she not come here into the light?'

My companion uttered no reply, but motioned to me that I should walk towards the window, through which the setting sun was pouring all its splendours.

'And who are you, miss?' said the old gentleman, regarding me fixedly, with his hands deep in the pockets of his dressing-gown.

'My name is Annie Gray,' said I, not overwell pleased, for I had been always a great pet with poor papa, and was not used to such rough questioning.

'O yes, of course,' rejoined he snappishly: 'that was easy to learn by heart: but it is not all your story, I suppose.'

'Sir,' interposed Mrs Mellon pleadingly, 'she is but a child, remember. If her face does not speak for her, she has nothing to say.'

'There is a likeness, without doubt,' said the old gentleman grudgingly; 'the scoundrel trusted to that, I have no doubt; but how do I know that he has not lied to me in this as in all else? How am I to know but that he hired the child on purpose to impose upon me, or that it is some bastard of his own?'

'Sir, the man is Dead,' said Mrs Mellon quietly.

'I know it, and am glad of it,' returned the old gentleman fiercely. 'But his falsehood may flourish after him; and mind,' added he, pointing to me with a shaking finger on which the jewels glistened like serpents' eyes, 'even if this child were what that man has written, I would never own her for a Dacre, never! You may give her house-room, if you please, but she is no guest of mine. I charge you, never let me see her.'

Without another word, he went back to his arm-chair, before the blazing wood-fire—although the month was June—and obeying Mrs Mellon's beckoning finger, nothing loath, I left the room.

'I don't like grandpapa at all,' said I, as soon as the double-doors had closed behind us.

'But he will like you, in time,' said the old house-keeper reassuringly. 'If you had known the trouble I had to persuade him to send for you at all, and the unwillingness he felt to see you— But there, child, how should you know anything about it. I tell you Mr Dacre saw the likeness as plainly as I see it, and all will be well if we have patience. It is a great deal that you are allowed to be in the house.'

'Who is it that I am like, please?' said I quietly.

'Well, you are like that little girl—who was your great-great-grandmother—no, *his*—in the gallery here. Nay—why should I keep it from the child?' muttered she to herself—'you are much more like some one else.' She stood still a while and listened. All was still in the great empty passage, where, if a mouse stirred, you could hear it, from end to end. 'Come here with me, Annie; but be sure you never tell what I shall shew you.' She drew a key from her pocket, and softly applied it to a door on the side opposite to that on which was the library we had just quitted; then, carefully taking out the key, she entered, closing the door behind us. It was a sitting-room—small by comparison with the other, and looking down upon a terrace, which bordered a lake, with one green island in it: a lady's room, to judge by the knickknacks upon the table; but what struck me about it most was the thick dust that lay on them and everywhere. There were some skeletons of flowers in a china vase upon the mantelpiece; a book, with a paper-knife between the leaves, lay upon the chair, as though just thrown down in haste; there were ashes in the grate, too, as though a fire had been kindled there but yesterday; but all these signs of recent occupancy were negated by what I have described—a coating, nearly an inch thick, of dust. The windows were fast shut, and very dim; and the air was so faint and musty, that the use of the great folding-screen, between the door and fireplace—itsself a mere dusty wall, upon which bird and flower were portrayed in vain—could scarce be guessed. There was something in the look of all these things which frightened me, and I was about to cry aloud, when suddenly, in the passage without, a door was heard to jar. 'Great Heaven!' exclaimed Mrs Mellon, 'some one has left the library! If your grandfather comes hither, we are lost!' We heard his slippered steps shuffling towards us along the oaken floor of the gallery without. 'The Lord have mercy upon us! Stoop down behind the screen, child; and neither speak nor move upon your life.'

In another moment, we had both crouched down on the thick layer of dust that overlaid the carpet, and fortunately, without much disturbing it, though, as it was, it flew up about us, and made me long to sneeze, like snuff. Then the door opened, and Mr Dacre came slowly into the room. I could see him through the space between the hinges of the screen, and could not but notice how changed he was since I had beheld him last. His pinched and puckered features were quite white; his eyes shone no longer, but were dimmed with tears; and his walk, instead of being rapid and impatient, was like that of one both sad and wearied. He came up to the fireplace, over which hung a large picture, the only one in the room, and as I had thought, so covered with dust, like everything else, that the painting was obliterated by it. This, however, was not the case; I had only beheld the canvas back of it; it had its face to the wall. He turned it slowly—reverently—into its proper position, and then I saw that it was the full-length portrait of a young girl. He stood before it with his chin resting on his hand. His lips moved, but no sound came from them; and presently, down his withered cheeks the tears began to steal. The touch of these seemed to rouse him; he brushed them hastily away, and looked about him, almost fiercely, as though to assure himself that there were no witnesses to his emotion; then, sighing heavily, he replaced the picture as he had found it, and left the room, locking the door, and taking away the key.

Until we heard the thud of the green baize door once more, neither of us dared to move. Then Mrs Mellon drew a long breath of relief. 'Come away, child,' cried she in a trembling voice, 'I ought never to have let you run this risk. If your grandpapa had discovered us, I should never more have been house-keeper at Dacre Hall, and you—well, I am not sure about you. He saw the likeness plainly enough, as I expected, and came here to compare them. That picture was the portrait of your mother, Annie: that room was her room. All is left there exactly as she left it years ago, when she ran away with your father. Nobody enters it from year's end to year's end, not even your grandpapa. What a mercy it was he did not notice that the door was already unlocked! Let us get the dust off our clothes before anybody sees us. O dear, O dear, I'm all of a twitter!'

For my part, I was not so much alarmed about grandpapa, as interested in the room we had just quitted. How strange it seemed that the last person who had sat there, so many years ago, should have been my own mother, the original of that beautiful picture! To think that her own fingers, that had so long been dust, as I was told, had arranged those very flowers in the vase; had placed that paper-knife in the book; had left upon the work-table that moth-eaten something, which had doubtless been some dainty piece of handiwork! A feeling weird and strange possessed my childish breast, but yet without terrifying it.

'Why did wicked grandpapa shut up mamma's room?' asked I, as I was being put to bed, after an excellent supper.

'Hush, Annie; your grandpapa is not wicked. He was angry because his daughter was disobedient, and fell in love with—ahem—with Mr Gray.'

'I love papa a great deal better than grandpapa,' said I, 'so why shouldn't *she*?'

'But your papa is dead now, my dear, and one can't love dead people, you know.'

That seemed unanswerable; and yet, if it was the case, I could not understand why grandpapa had had tears in his eyes: revolving this knotty point, as I lay all alone in my little bed, but yet within call of the kind old housekeeper, I fell asleep.

'Mrs Mellon,' said I gravely, as I sat at breakfast the next morning in her own snug and pleasant sitting-room, with its cupboards full of delicious jams

and preserves, and all the sweetmeats and spices of the Indies, 'I don't like people coming into my room after I'm gone to bed.'

'Well, my darling' (it was astonishing how fond the old lady was of me by this time, and, to do myself justice, my affection was equally strong for her), 'I only stepped in, just before I went to bed, to see that you were quite comfortable, and I didn't even know that I had waked you. You seemed to be fast asleep enough.'

'So I was,' said I. 'I didn't know that you had come at all. I am sure you are very welcome, but I don't like strange people.'

'Gad a mercy!' cried the housekeeper, putting down the saucer of tea that she was carrying to her mouth, 'what do you mean, child?'

'I mean that I don't like the old woman in the frilled white cap, that came and stared at me so last night, without speaking.'

Half-a-dozen different expressions flitted across the old housekeeper's face, as I said those words. At first, I thought she was frightened, although I could not imagine for what reason; and then that she did not believe what I had told her. She had all the servants under her, she said, and thought it exceedingly improbable that any of them should have come into my room at night without her leave.

'Somebody did come,' reiterated I; 'but it was a nice clean-looking old woman enough, and I daresay she meant no harm.'

'O no,' answered the housekeeper hastily; 'she certainly meant no harm. But if it happens again, Annie, be sure you tell me.'

Mrs Mellon said no more; but for the rest of the meal, and indeed throughout that day, I caught her casting the most curious glances at me, and very much disconcerted she looked whenever I did so. I was not allowed to stray about the grand old house, although I longed to explore it, for fear I should meet with Mr Dacre; but the housekeeper took me for a ramble in the grounds, which were very various and extensive. She shewed me what had been mamma's favourite walk in the avenue that led to the bowling-green, and the summer-house on the island in the lake where she used to sit, and then she pointed up to those dim and dusty windows—through which mamma had taken her last look of all those pleasant places ere she left them for ever—and bade me beware of undutifulness and disobedience.

Mrs Mellon meant nothing but good, I am very sure, but the effect of what she said was to make me think of dear papa's poverty-stricken face, and blame Mr Dacre because it had been so pale and wan. Being so rich, why did he not send him help? And why had I been so strictly enjoined not to mention my own name to him, because it was poor papa's? If it was not possible to love people who were dead, neither surely ought we to hate them. I felt an affectionate pity, too—independent of the relationship, which, indeed, I could scarcely understand—for the beautiful young lady whose portrait hung in that neglected chamber, and although I wondered how she could have wished to have left so fair a home, I could not think she had done wrong.

I went so far, indeed, as to argue the matter with Mrs Mellon; but my childish obstinacy seemed to give the old lady so much pain, and even apprehension—she wringing her hands, and muttering to herself: 'Her mother's child—her mother's child all over,' in quite a piteous manner—that I ceased to oppose her.

That night, I was again waked by the same silent visitor, and this time I took more particular note of her. She was an old woman, far older than Mrs Mellon, almost as aged as she who looked after the children's ward in the workhouse, but ever so much cleaner and tidier. She was dressed in black, except her cap and wristbands, which were very white, and

stiffly starched; and stood with her back to the window, through which the moon was shining, and with her wrinkled face, looking very calm and sad, turned full towards me.

'You are very rude,' said I in a pet, 'to come here again, and I will tell Mrs Mellon;' and thereupon I called hastily for the housekeeper, who came in a moment, for she had been sitting up in case this very thing should occur.

'This woman is here again,' cried I; but even while I spoke, the figure had vanished, although the housekeeper was standing in the only doorway of the little room. Then, for the first time, I was really frightened.

'Can you not stop her coming?' cried I. 'I would rather go back to the big room at the workhouse than see her again.'

'No, dear child, I cannot stop her,' exclaimed Mrs Mellon hastily; 'but Mr Dacre can and shall.' And without more ado she snatched me up, and, throwing a shawl over my little palpitating body, carried me straight into the library, where it was her master's custom to sit up very late at night, and where we found him.

He started up, surprised and angry; but for once Mrs Mellon did not seem afraid of him. 'Ask the child,' exclaimed she, speaking with great excitement—'ask the child why we came here. She will tell you that this is the second night that she has seen Nurse Austin.'

'It is false!' cried he; 'it is a plot of yours and hers;' but I noticed that his shrill voice shook, and his spare frame trembled while he spoke.

'Nay,' said she, 'it is true, and you believe it. Ask her—ask her.'

'I know nothing of Nurse Austin,' said I sturdily; 'but I had rather be with Dame Norris' [that was the workhouse nurse], 'than have that silent woman in the white cap come to stare at me every night. I had rather leave this fine house—thank you—than see her again; and I don't want you to be my grandpapa, you cross old man, one bit.'

'Hush, hush; you don't know what you are saying, child,' cried Mrs Mellon; but Mr Dacre took me on his knee, and wiped my tears away quite tenderly.

'If,' said he, 'Nurse Austin has been really troubling you, I will see to it, and she shall do so no more;' and when he had asked me a few questions, in order to make quite sure (he said) of who it was among the servants that had been so rude, he kissed me on the forehead, and said that he foresaw we should be the best of friends.

'Then you must not hate papa,' said I, not yet quite mollified; 'and you must let mamma's room be unlocked and made pretty again, as she used to have it.'

And though I saw that poor Mrs Mellon turned white with terror at my boldness, grandpapa only patted my head and murmured: 'Yes, Annie, yes; it shall all be as you wish.'

He was convinced that I was indeed his grandchild, because Nurse Austin, who never visits any but a Dacre, had come to my little room. For seven generations, that servant, faithful beyond the grave, has watched over us, under the old roof, and when anything of importance, whether for good or evil, is about to happen to any one of us, she makes her appearance at our bedside. Mamma, they tell me, saw her the night before she left the Hall for ever. I saw her the night before grandpapa made his will and me his heiress, acknowledging me as his daughter's child.

If we were not 'the best of friends' from that time forth, as he had predicted, we were, at all events, very constant companions. I do believe he was never so happy as when sitting in that room, now swept and garnished, where the portrait of my mother smiled down upon him from the wall, while her

daughter played at his knee, or ransacked the shelves for picture-books. But before the year was out, Nurse Austin came to fetch him, and he had to leave me with strange guardians, that cared no more for me (although they were much more polite) than did those of the workhouse board-room. Good Mrs Mellon left me, too, long before I was grown up—a loss I felt very deeply. I was friendless, though no longer poor, until I met my husband here. It was then, for the first time, that I felt why mamma had given up all for Mr Gray, and knew that I should have done the same.

As our fair hostess finished, she cast across the table on her husband one swift and tender look, that was in itself a love-story; and amid respectful silence, lifted her wineglass, with 'God bless you all!'

It was quite a touching scene. There was no rapturous applause, but each one looked at his neighbour with delighted admiration. So thrilling and unexpected was the *dénouement*, that it was a minute or two before the page himself, who had been furtively filling his mouth with plums throughout the early portion of the narrative, resumed suspended mastication.

'Only think of the mistress being haunted!' observed the upper-nurse, in hushed and frightened tones. 'Why, that's worse than anything that has happened to me, and I've been buried alive, sir.'

Mrs Clevedon's ears, though exquisitely shaped, were very sharp in the acoustic sense. 'I thought you had something to tell us, nurse, beside *Puss in Boots*,' said she smiling. 'Silence, if you please, for Mrs Peach's story.'

A burst of laughter, not certainly of a character to encourage a literary *débütant* of weak nerves, here shook the table. But my fair neighbour, who perhaps recognised a malicious ring in it here and there—and, indeed, Mrs Antray and herself, as I afterwards heard, headed different factions in the household, and were in that relation of polite severity to one another which is entitled 'not upon terms'—far from shewing the white-feather, observed with heightened colour: 'Folks may giggle for want of brains; but when my mistress asks me to lend a hand to anything, though it mightn't be quite my place'—here she darted such a glance at the still-room maid as spoke whole volumes of satire—'for my part, I'm allus willing.'

It was with the utmost difficulty that I restrained myself from patting this dauntless woman on the back; but I feared that form of giving her encouragement might have been misinterpreted by her enemies; and, indeed, she did not need it, but straightway commenced as follows:

THE NURSE'S STORY.

WHAT I am about to tell you happened several years ago, when I was a much younger woman than I am now. At that time, I was nurse in the family of Sir Rufus Stornaway. I was not looked upon in the light of a common come-and-go-servant, but almost as if I was one of the family; for Sir Rufus himself had been nursed by my mother, and he was glad to have my mother's daughter in his house, rather than a stranger, when his son and heir's pretty blue eyes first opened on the world.

Master George was born in town; but as soon as my Lady had got her strength again, we went down to our place in the midland counties; and, except for three months in each summer, there we stayed for several years. When Master George was between

six and seven years old, an aunt of his papa's died, leaving Sir Rufus a lot of money; and with the money, a big country-house on the south coast, called Wingwood Manor, to which place we all moved in the course of a month or two. Our first governess had just left us, and Sir Rufus had so much on his hands just then that he seemed in no hurry about getting a second, so that Master George was put entirely under my charge for a little while, for which I was by no means sorry, not having quite got over a sort of jealous feeling at my dear boy being taken from me, and put under the care of another, even for a few hours a day; although I knew, of course, that, sooner or later, he would have to leave me altogether.

Thus it fell out that Master Stornaway and I took long rambles nearly every day out on the sea-coast for many a pleasant mile. It was mid-autumn, sunny and warm through the day, but with mornings and evenings that were pleasantly crisped by the first breath of the coming winter. Both to Master George and myself, the sea looked fresh and strange—we had neither of us seen it for over twelve months—and we seemed never to tire of hunting for pretty shells and curious live things on the beach. But if we did chance to weary of the shore, inland, a little way off, there was a great stretch of nut-wood, to which we had free access; while in the lanes and by-roads, there were blackberry-bushes by hundreds, all over-weighted with fruit, that seemed to cry aloud to be gathered.

Sometimes Master George and I went out for the whole day, taking lunch with us; and this was just what we had arranged to do on the particular morning I have now in my mind. It was the fineness of the weather that tempted us. As usual, we were to set off as soon as breakfast was over.

'Which way are you going this morning?' asked Davis, the upper-housemaid, as I was putting up some luncheon to take with us.

'Most likely down to the shore. Master George likes to go there better than anywhere else,' said I, little thinking how my words would be called to mind a few hours later, and what the effect of them would be.

'Stupid place, the shore,' said Davis with a toss of her head. 'For my part, I wonder you're not tired of going there so often.'

Just as we were starting, Gaunt, the great house-dog, came leaping and barking across the lawn, and begged as plainly as words could have done to be taken with us. But he had misbehaved himself once or twice lately, so he was ordered back indoors, and we started alone.

We had been about an hour and a half on the beach; I reading, and Master George amusing himself with some young crabs and a magnifying-glass, when I bethought myself that it was just the right sort of day for visiting Wale Abbey, a ruin some three or four miles away, which I had lately been reading about in the guide-book, and which I had made up my mind to visit the first time an occasion offered. When Master George was asked whether he would like to go as far as Wale, he jumped at the idea of a change, and persuaded me to start without delay.

Although I had never been to the Abbey, I could give a pretty good guess as to the direction we must take in order to find it. A three miles' walk close under the cliffs, along the hard firm sand that was covered by every tide, brought us to a little wooded valley that cut the cliffs in two, up which went a winding footway, half hidden among the trees. Following this footway, with our backs turned to the sea, we came, in another quarter of an hour, to the ruins, which lay on a wide grassy slope, shut in on three sides by hills, but open on the fourth, so that many a mile of sunny country could be seen by us when we

had mounted the winding staircase that led to the top of the tower.

Except this tower, the Abbey was quite in ruins, so that there was really not much to see; but I had been reading about the old place, and was glad to have seen it; and I felt now as if I could better believe some of the strange things that were said to have happened in it hundreds of years ago.

Our walk had given us an appetite, and we sat down to our luncheon at the bottom of the staircase. We were just in the midst of it, when I was startled by the falling of some heavy drops of rain. I stood up and looked around. A great black cloud was creeping slowly over the hills: there was every sign of a coming storm.

In a few seconds, the rain came down faster than I had ever seen it come down before. It was necessary to find shelter somewhere, and Master George's quick eyes had discovered a hiding-place while I was still looking helplessly about me. From what I learned afterwards, it was the only place about the ruins where even a tolerable shelter could have been found. It was a narrow opening in the wall—an old doorway, no doubt—under the staircase that led to the top of the tower, and it seemed to lead down by two or three steps to a room or dungeon of considerable size. At the first glance, this underground room seemed to have no other opening than the doorway, and to receive light from that alone; but when I had ventured down the steps, and found myself on its hard earthen floor, I saw that it was also lighted from the opposite side by a long narrow slit in the thick wall.

It was not without a slight shrinking of the nerves that I ventured into this underground cell; but the rain was coming down as if it meant to drown the world, and there was no choice left. Master George followed me down the stairs as brave as a little lion: and indeed he was not half so timid in the dark as I was. We had just got under cover when we heard the first burst of thunder. The next crash was much louder, and then the lightning began to play about the heavens like a great fiery snake, and the rain fell in torrents.

By this time the last patch of blue sky was completely hidden behind the great cloud that had come up so swiftly from the sea. The roll and crash overhead seemed to have neither beginning nor end, and every few seconds came the blue zigzag of the lightning, so terribly vivid that neither Master George nor I could bear to look on it with unshaded eyes. We crept to the farther side of the dungeon, and Master George covered his face with a corner of my shawl. We neither of us spoke: the scene was too grand for any words.

I was just saying to myself: 'It can't last long like this; it must soon be over,' when there came a flash more terrible than any I had seen before, and in the same instant of time the building over our heads gave a great crack, that made itself heard even above the thunder, and the whole place seemed as though it were falling in and burying us alive.

'We are killed!' cried Master George, as he flung up his arms and caught me tightly round the neck; and, indeed, I myself thought that our last moments on earth were come. For a few seconds the roar and rush in our ears were something awful; the place in which we were darkened suddenly; a thick choking cloud of dust swept over us, and the end of all things seemed at hand.

I sat very still for a little while, crouched up in a corner of the dungeon, and holding the boy in my arms. There was upon me a sort of dim surprise at finding that neither of us was hurt; and I soon began to look about me, and to consider what had happened to us. The storm was still raging, but less violently than before, and seemed to be fading slowly away in the distance. As the cloud of dust settled down, I

saw that there was still a little daylight in the place—that which came through the long narrow slit in the thick wall—but only enough, just then, to make darkness visible, as we say.

But where was the doorway? I looked round again and again, but I could not see it. I rubbed my eyes and stood up, and made sure that I was not blind; and again my glance went wandering round the place, but there was no break to be seen in the black wall by which we were shut in. I crossed the floor towards the spot where, as I judged, the doorway ought to be, and then I was not long in finding out what sort of accident it was that had happened to us. The tower had no doubt been struck by that terrible flash; the part that had fallen had blocked up the doorway with its ruins, and Master George and I were buried alive!

For some moments I could hardly realise to its full extent the misfortune that had befallen us; but I was roused from my stupor by a touch of the boy's hand, and by his innocent words: 'Please, Peach, I should like to go home now. Mamma will be expecting us.'

I turned and caught him up in my arms, and kissed him wildly, as if he had been my own child.

'We cannot go home just yet, dear,' I said. 'Part of the tower has come down, and we must stay here till some one finds us.'

'Poor mamma!' cried the boy, and then he burst into tears. Even at that moment, he was thinking more of his mother's distress than of his own danger. I soothed him as well as I could, and in a little while he became calmer, and ceased crying.

'How long shall we have to stay here, Peach?' was his next question. 'And how will they know where to look for us, when they find we don't go home?'

That was just the question I was asking myself. We had never been at Wale Abbey before, and no one would imagine that we had gone so far from home. We had not met a soul during our walk along the shore and up the valley. Weeks might pass before any one visited the ruins, and, meanwhile, what would become of us?

Master George repeated his questions.

'I cannot tell you, my darling, how long we may have to stay here,' I said. 'They may find us in a few hours; or it may be to-morrow, or even the day after that, before we are discovered.'

The boy's hand nestled into mine as I said these words, and grasped my fingers very tight. 'I am not frightened, Peach,' he said; 'I know my papa would search all over the world rather than lose us; and my papa is so clever that it will not take him long to find us.'

'I hope with all my heart, dear, that he may find us,' I answered; 'and I think that he will find us,' added I a moment or two after, just to keep up the child's courage, though in my own secret heart I doubted greatly.

As mentioned before, we had brought with us a small bag containing our provisions for the day. We had eaten our luncheon before the coming on of the storm, and I now opened the bag to ascertain what was left. There could not be much, I knew. There was, first, a bottle holding about a pint of sherry-and-water; then, three small sandwiches, a part of a French roll, and, at the bottom, about half-a-dozen small wine-biscuits—and that was all. One by one, slowly and carefully, I put these things back into the bag, and my heart sank within me as I thought for how short a time they would serve to keep life in two people.

'You remember the story I read you a few days ago, Master George,' said I, 'about the shipwreck of the *Sorceress*, and the sufferings of the captain and some of the crew in an open boat at sea?'

'Yes, Peach; and how they had scarcely any provisions in the boat with them, and had to live

on half a biscuit a day, and a little water, for nearly a month.'

'Just so; and that's the way we must do, Master George, dear. We must go on short allowance, the same as the sailors did. We may not be found for some days, you know; so we must make our provisions last as long as we possibly can. Even now, we are not so badly off as the brave sailors of the *Sorceress* were. They were parched up by the hot sun; they were washed over by the salt sea; day and night, some of them had to keep working at the oars; and they knew that if even a little bit of a storm came on, they must all go to the bottom; while we here have nothing to do but wait patiently and bravely till your papa finds out where we are hidden.'

'I am not a bit hungry—not a bit,' said my darling. 'And I will try to be brave, Peach—I will indeed.'

My heart was bleeding for him all the time—it was. But it would not do to let him see me give way, not ever so little. 'That's spoken like my own true-hearted boy,' I said; and then I drew off my shawl, and wrapped it round him, for the day was nearly at an end by this time, and the air of our dungeon was growing damp and chilly. The rain was entirely over, but the low, far-off muttering of the thunder could still be heard at intervals. When I came to look more closely at the heap of stones, and cement, and rubbish with which the doorway was blocked up, I saw, even more clearly than at first, how utterly hopeless was any thought of escape that way. The great heap that lay there must have been many tons in weight, and utterly beyond my poor strength to stir in the least, even if I had had proper things to move it with. The great wonder was that the roof itself had not fallen in and buried us for ever. A few large stones I did pick out from the bottom of the heap, so as to form two rough seats for Master George and myself to sit on. As for the slit in the wall, nothing much bigger than a pigeon could have got in or out that way, and other opening there was now none. The flashes of lightning had shewn me that the dungeon was nine or ten feet high, and had a rough circular roof, with a huge oaken beam running right across it. The floor, fortunately, was of dry, firm earth, and there was little or no moisture on the walls.

'We shall have to pass the night here, Master George; that seems quite certain,' said I: 'don't you begin to feel sleepy?'

'I am not at all sleepy, thank you, nurse,' he answered. 'But I think I will say my prayers; they can be heard just as well here as in my own room: can't they, nurse?'

'Just as well, dear love,' said I. So I sat down on the stones, and then he knelt before me and said his little prayers, and I am sure the saying of them did us both good, though I couldn't help crying a bit when he had done.

'I have no mamma to kiss me to-night, so you must kiss me instead,' he said; which I did, nothing loath.

Then I took off one or two of my under-things, and spread them on the floor, so as to make a rough resting-place for him; and then, with my shawl wrapped round him, he lay down, and in five minutes was happily asleep. Once or twice during the dark hours, he woke up with a start, and cried out that the walls were falling upon him; at which times I took one of his hands in mine, and began to croon over one of the hymns with which I used to get him to sleep when he was a wee toddling thing, and could scarcely speak two words. It had not lost its old effect; he was quickly asleep again, and did not wake for good till broad daylight.

As for me, I spent most of the night in walking backwards and forwards from end to end of my prison. My mind was so excited that I knew it was useless for me to try to sleep. I had scarcely

room for any thought except that all-important one: how many weary hours should we have to wait before we were rescued from our prison?

At the Manor, they must have taken the alarm hours ago, and doubtless more than one party had already been sent in search of us. But would they find us? That was a question that my sinking heart answered but too forebodingly. But I would not let my courage sink more than I could help. I did my best to look on the bright side of the picture, and tried to impress myself with the certainty that help could not fail to come with the coming day. Now and then, I kept repeating half-aloud some verses from Scripture that I had got by heart when a girl at school; and it was wonderful how they seemed to comfort me. The night was clear and beautiful, and the stars seemed to look in upon us with pitying eyes as they moved slowly across the narrow opening in our prison-wall. By and by came daylight, and then I fell into a troubled doze for a couple of hours. When I awoke, my dear boy was sitting up on his rough bed looking at me with such serious, wide-open eyes as made him seem twenty years older than he really was.

'Well, my darling,' said I, 'you must want your breakfast; and yet it must be a very little breakfast, because, you know, we have agreed to do as the poor sailors did, and make what we have got last as long as possible.'

'Yes, we will do as the sailors did,' he said eagerly. 'I am not hungry yet—at least not very; and I could wait a good while longer without anything to eat.'

'You shall not wait another minute,' said I. And with that I gave him one of the sandwiches and a little sherry-and-water; but when he saw me putting the bag away without taking my share, he refused to touch what I had given him, and so obliged me to tell a little fib, and say that I had had something to eat while he was asleep, and could not possibly touch another morsel.

The day passed on slowly and wearily enough, and as hour went by after hour without bringing those who were to save us, my hopes began to fade out slowly, and the certainty of the terrible doom before us fell like a cold shadow over my heart. Still I kept up my cheerfulness before the boy as well as I could, talking to him and encouraging him; but sometimes it was all I could do not to break down.

Every half-hour or so during the day, I shouted with all my strength through the opening in the wall, thinking that, may be, some one might be passing near enough the old tower to hear me; but there came no answer, nor any sound save the far-off murmur of the incoming tide. And so the day wore itself away, and night came round again; and I began to feel—so long did we seem to have been shut up—as if Master George and I were the only two people left alive on earth, and that the dread Angel of Peace had forgotten to gather us under his wings.

The second night passed away very much as the first had done, except that I slept more, being thoroughly worn out. A mouthful or two of food and a little wine-and-water made our breakfast next morning. If we could have only had the water separate from the wine, we should have suffered less than we did from thirst, which was even more difficult to bear than the hunger that bit us so sharply. But we might as well have asked for the moon as for a drop of cold water, and there was just as much likelihood of our getting the one as the other.

The morning of the third day since we left home was now come. As near as I could judge, it was about ten o'clock when, for the fifth or sixth time since daybreak, I called aloud for help, but with little hope that my cry would be heard. I should utterly fail to describe the feelings of Master George and myself when we found that it was heard. My heart was so full that I had scarcely voice enough left to guide the persons who had answered my cry to the spot

where we were buried alive. With some difficulty, they found the place, and I quite started when they came on to the little green in front of the loophole, which was almost level with the ground, and I saw who they were. They were none other than old Moll Boxeye and her blind son Phil. For all I had only been such a short time in that part of the country, I knew them through having seen the woman lurking about the Manor at different times, trying to persuade the servants to have their fortunes told; and through her having been caught trespassing by Sir Rufus, who threatened her with a month's imprisonment should he find her about the premises again. Phil played a rude set of bagpipes of his own invention at the country fairs and merry-makings, and his mother's ready whine and sharp eye for coppers were known for twenty miles round the Manor. Old Moll was more like one of the three witches I once saw on the stage in a great play in London, than a woman in ordinary life. Phil was a youth of nineteen, fat and sly-looking. Such were the two who now hurried towards the tower in answer to my cries, Phil following close behind his mother, and keeping fast hold of a corner of her tattered shawl to guide himself along.

'Here's a pretty hullabaloo!' shouted Moll, limping rapidly along, and peering about in her efforts to discover from what point the calls for help had come. 'In the devil's name, where are you, and what do you call yourself when you're at home?'

Even then, it took me some minutes to make her understand where we were, and through what mischance we were unable to get out; and then I had to enlighten her as to our names, and where we came from. She had squatted herself down on the grass by this time, just in front of our narrow prison-window, with her hands clasped round her knees, and she kept on nodding and leering at me, and blinking wickedly with her rheumy eyes, but said hardly a word in reply till I had done. Phil, somewhere in the background, was torturing his pipes as if he had got them on the rack, or were cutting them to pieces a bit at a time, and they could feel it.

'So, so; you are Mistress Peach the nurse; and the kid with you is son and heir to the grand barrow-knight up at the big house! Well, queer things do come about sometimes in this world. And you can't get out; and nobody knows where you are; and if they don't find you soon, you will die of hunger. Dear heart alive! Why, it's the prettiest little story I've heard for many a long day. And I suppose you expect me to help you? Me, me!' She pointed to her breast with her skinny finger, and turned on me with a savage snarl that shewed the range of her toothless gums.

'All that I ask of you is to let Sir Rufus Stornaway know as quickly as possible how his son and I are fixed. He will reward you amply for any trouble or expense you may be put to in the matter. Think what this poor boy's mother must be suffering, not knowing where he is, nor whether she shall ever see him alive again.'

'I am thinking,' she answered gloomily; and then she sat glaring into vacancy for full five minutes, but neither speaking nor stirring. She came to herself with a deep sigh, and turning to me, she said: 'Give me some token—some little thing that you wear—to take up to the big house, just to shew that I've really seen you; else, they'll maybe call old Moll a liar, and bid her go about her business.'

'You dear kind soul!' I exclaimed. 'You will be more welcome at the Manor than the finest lady that ever entered its door; and you will be well rewarded, don't fear.—What shall I give you? Here, take this;' and I drew off a small knitted tippet that I wore round my shoulders. 'And take this too,' added I, as I unclasped Master George's belt, and thrust the two articles through the window towards her. She put out her hand, and seized them as a

miser might seize on a bag of gold, and held them up close before her eyes so as to examine them thoroughly, chuckling to herself, and nodding her head from side to side, as if she were trying to loosen it. 'O my, here's a crummy lark!' she cried in a shrill, quavering voice. 'O Phil, my precious one, come here and hold your mother's sides, or she'll burst with laughing! Ain't it just spicy? O no, not at all! Phil, ye devil's limb, play us *The Roup o' Clinbuck*, and make the old pipes spit fire and brimstone!'

Phil grunted by way of answer, and then struck up a wild, melancholy air, that I had never heard before, through which, every now and then, there burst a shrill, mournful wail, like the wail of some animal in its death-agony, that chilled one's blood to hear. As soon as her son began to play, Moll stood up, leaving the things I had given her on the ground. Flinging her battered old bonnet on one side, she tied up her long snaky hair in a thick knot at the back of her head; then she drew the skirts of her torn gown through the leathern belt which bound her waist, and shuffling out of her thick shoes, and snapping her fingers loudly, she began to dance, barefooted, to her son's wild music. Round and round the two articles I had given her, which still lay on the grass, she danced with many a queer antic and shrill yell of triumph—now with her arms a-kinbo; now with one hand or the other flung wildly above her head; now holding out her rags, between thumb and finger, as daintily as though she were a young lady at her first ball; but always keeping time wonderfully to the music. Every time the pipes gave out that strange, melancholy wail, of which I have already spoken, Moll drew a finger quickly across her throat, and gave utterance to a loud choking noise, that was more horrible to hear than anything else.

'Is she mad?' whispered Master George, as he gazed out at her with frightened eyes. At that moment, she certainly looked crazy enough for Bedlam.

At length, she dropped down on the grass from sheer want of breath, and lay there panting for several minutes. Phil still kept up his wild music, for when he had once begun playing, he never ceased till told by his mother to do so.

'Do make haste, there's a dear kind soul!' I cried. 'We want to get out so very, very much.'

'No doubt you do want to get out very, very much,' she said maliciously, resuming her old posture with her hands clasped round her knees. 'But if you think that old Moll's going to help you out of your mess, you never made a bigger tom-fool's mistake in your life—never!'

'But you are going up to the Manor, are you not?' I gasped out with a strange misgiving at my heart. 'You are going to let Sir Rufus know where we are, and how it is that we can't get out?'

'O lor! Phil, ain't she innocent? Green as grass, eh? It does one no end of good to listen to her.' Then, turning savagely on me, with wickedness peeping out of every line of her withered old face, and cutting the air slowly with a skinny finger, as if to add venom to her words, she said: 'As for you, Mistress Peach, I neither love you nor hate you; I don't care a brass farden about you, and I'd as lief help you out of your trouble as not. It's the brat that's with you that I've a grudge against, and that because of the name he bears. And as I can't help you without helping him, you must both of you stop where you are till you starve and rot.—What grudge have I got against the poor boy, do you say? Grudge big enough to make me hate the whole breed for ever and a day. Wasn't it a Stornaway—this very brat's uncle—that got my poor boy, my own poor Jim, transported for twenty years, for just knocking a meddlesome gamekeeper on the head? And after that, can you expect me to love any of the breed? No. I hate them root and branch, and I've sworn to

work them harm whenever a happy chance puts them into my hands. And it's an oath that I mean to keep—yes, I do! And now I'll just tell you what fancy little game I'm after.—Listen, both of you, with all your ears. These two things that you have given me, I shall dip in the salt water as I go along; and then I shall go up to the big house, and pull a long face, and shew the things, saying I found them at low-water on the beach, and ask whether they belonged to the woman and the boy for whom they have been looking these two days. And they will take the things, saying: "Poor dears! one cannot doubt that they are drowned." And they will go and look for your bodies on the shore, but they will never think of coming near the tower, where you will be snugly hidden away all the time. Oh, what a sweet revenge it will be! Months from this time, I will send word to my Lady where she may find her curled darling, or as much of him as the rats may have spared. And that shall be a mother's revenge on the proud Stornaways for what they did to her boy!—Come, Phil—come, you blind jackass, and let us set about this bit of sport without delay."

She picked the things off the ground, waved a lean arm menacingly at us, and strode rapidly away, blind Phil hanging on to the tail of her shawl as usual.

I was so completely stunned, that I could do nothing but stare after her like a woman in a fit. I tried to call her back, but could not—the words seemed to die away in my throat. I caught Master George up in my arms, and covered him with kisses.

"Pray for us both, my dear," I said—"pray that our sins may be forgiven us; pray that our end may not be long in coming, for our last earthly hope has fled."

"Don't cry, nurse, please, don't cry," pleaded the boy, nestling with his arms round my neck. "I am not a bit afraid to die; at least, I think not. Mamma has often told me that if we are only good, we have nothing to fear; and I have tried to be good, tried very hard sometimes; and papa said the other day that I was not at all a bad boy: so, do you think, nurse, that I need be very much afraid of dying?"

"You afraid, my darling! I wish we had all as little to fear.—But there; my tears are all gone now, and I will promise you not to cry any more. So let you and me sing that little hymn which begins: "My troubles at Thy feet I cast."

When the hymn was at an end, we were both silent for a little while, and, for my own part, I'm sure I felt happier and more resigned than before. Master George was the first to speak. "I have not forgotten the brave sailors, nurse," he said; "but I am very, very hungry."

It seemed to me no longer any use to half-starve the lad, now that all hope of escape was at an end; so I let him eat as much as he chose of what was left; but he was satisfied, or pretended to be, with very little.

One hour faded into another, till the day slipped quietly away, and night came round once more. Master George and I sang together, and talked on many subjects too sacred to be spoken of here. We were not unhappy, by any means, but quietly resigned to that fate which it now seemed impossible that we should escape. That we both suffered considerably from thirst and lack of food, all who are now listening to me will easily believe, so that it is not necessary for me to do more than merely to mention that such was the case. In spite of his hunger, Master George slept soundly, and for nearly as many hours as he would have slept at home. From time to time, I dozed, but during the greater part of the night I was wide awake, and thinking of a thousand different things, as who that was in my position could have helped doing. When morning came again, something of its freshness and beauty were visible to me even through the narrow outlook of my prison; something of its holy calm seemed to enter into my soul,

and make me solemnly glad that for me the world's weary toil was almost at an end.

An hour or two later on, I took Master George's little penknife, and scratched a few words with it on our prison-wall at the spot where daylight shone the brightest—a few words telling who we were, and the fate that had befallen us, together with the date, and one or two other particulars.

Scarcely had I finished this self-imposed task, when Moll Boxeye's shrill voice was heard calling: "Hullo, there! Any one at home? Or are you all gone to dine with the Man in the Moon?" And next moment the old witch and her blind son made their appearance in the little glade in front of the tower. "Not dead yet, eh?" she chuckled. "All the more fun in store, then, for you and me, Phil, my infant. The brat will last a few more mornings yet, I daresay, and his mammy crying her eyes out all the while at home, thinking his little corpus has gone to feed the fishes. Oh, my stars and garters, ain't it a lark! And warn't it better than any play that was ever invented, to see old Moll go up to the big house, and with a long face, and a tear in her eye, that she had squeezed out after several minutes' hard work, give up the blessed things she'd found on the beach all dripping wet, and to hear the questions they axed her, and to see the fuss they made of her; stuffing her with beef and beer, and giving her a bright golden yellowboy to put in her pocket! O my!"

"You wretched woman!" I said, "go away, and leave us to die in peace."

"Wretched woman, indeed!" she shrieked; "I'm no more a wretched woman than you are; and I'm not going away. I'm coming morning after morning till you're dead, and for long after you're dead; till I've seen the rats pick your bones white and clean. Ay, ay, Moll will have her revenge to the last farden. —Strike up a tune, Phil, you imp of Beelzebub, and treat your old mother to a dance this fine morning!"

But instead of striking up, Phil stood like one petrified, listening intently. "The sound that had caught his ear caught that of his mother in a few seconds, and came, last of all, to us in our prison. It was the loud baying of a dog, now near at hand, now further off; but whose it was, no one that had once heard it could ever after be at a loss to know.

"That's Gaunt, nurse! that's Gaunt!" cried Master George on the instant. My heart seemed to rise up into my throat, and I felt that we were saved.

With all my strength, I called the dog: he heard me, and came bounding into the glade half crazy with delight. His deep tones soon brought up the party of men with whom he had been out along the shore looking for the two bodies which they were in hopes the tide would cast up. The scene that followed you can imagine better than I could describe it. Still, it was not till the end of four hours that they succeeded in digging us out of our living tomb; and when Master George and I stepped out once more into the sunshine, I believe there was scarcely a dry eye in the crowd.

The moment Gaunt came on the scene, Moll and her son quietly disappeared; and I don't believe they have ever ventured within twenty miles of the Manor from that day to this.

"Well done, nurse," cried Tom, hammering the table with both hands.

"Well told, madam," cried I with genuine enthusiasm. Indeed, the applause was well-nigh universal, and joined in even by Mrs Peach's enemies.

"I am glad she wasna buried alive," ejaculated the Scotch gardener soliloquising; and a roar of laughter followed his very moderate good wishes.

"The tale was very well—very well, indeed, Mrs Peach," drawled the valet patronisingly.

But this was more than the good lady could bear. "Tale!" cried she; "it was a true story, every

word of it, and I'll'— She hung a moment there in speechless indignation, then struck by a happy thought, thus finished her sentence: 'I'll thank you to tell the next one, Mr Jasmin.'

THE VALET'S STORY.

SOME of you may probably be aware that before I accepted the position at present held by me, I lived with the late Lord Castleford; and a pleasanter person than his Lordship was, no gentleman need wish to accept office under. He had my attentions for several years, and but for his untimely demise, they would probably have been his up to the present time. It is some consolation to me to reflect that an unpleasant word never passed between us during the whole time that we resided together; and this mourning-ring, which you, Mrs Peach, were pleased to admire the other day, is worn by me in memory of his Lordship.

We went down to Scotland most years for our shooting, and to pay a round of visits among the different country-houses. On these occasions, we were generally accompanied by her Ladyship. One year, while we were staying at Craithie Castle, within half-a-dozen miles of Edinburgh, her Ladyship was telegraphed for from town, and had to go up express, in consequence of the illness of one of her daughters. News came three days later that the young lady was much better; and by the same letter her Ladyship informed us that she was going to assist at a rout at the Countess of Pevensay's, next evening but one, and that her jewel-case must be sent up to her without fail.

'All very well for her Ladyship,' muttered my Lord, as he shut up his double eye-glass; 'but what means have I of sending her jewel-case up to town? She can hardly expect that I should take it myself.'

I was just touching up his Lordship's wig at the time, but as my advice was not directly asked, I did not feel called upon to give it. After a few minutes devoted to silent thought, his Lordship resumed. 'I think, Jasmin,' said he, 'that I must send you up to town with her Ladyship's jewel-case.'

I was so astonished, that with the tongs, which happened to be in my hands at the moment, I all but singed his Lordship's favourite curl. 'Most happy, my Lord, I'm sure,' murmured I.

'Yes, Jasmin,' he resumed, 'you have been in my service for several years, and I have every confidence in your honesty.'

'A confidence which your Lordship will not find misplaced.'

'Just so—just so. You may consider the thing as settled. Hold yourself in readiness to start by the mail to-night. You will be in London by ten to-morrow morning.'

The mail-train leaves Edinburgh at half-past nine in the evening, and a few minutes before that time, Lord Castleford and I drove into the station. By his Lordship's directions, I took a first-class ticket, I was favoured with a few last whispered injunctions; then I got into the train; the precious box was handed to me; and, with a kindly nod, his Lordship turned on his heel, and left me to myself.

I was beginning to finger my cigar-case affectionately, in the hope that I should have the compartment to myself, and so be able to enjoy a smoke *en route*, when a sharp-featured middle-aged female stopped at the door, and after peering in for a moment, as if to see whether there was a comfortable seat still unoccupied, she called out in a shrill voice: '*Hi! portere! portere!*—open this door, *s'il vous plait*. I choose to seat myself here, *moi*.'

With a sigh, I relinquished my cigar-case, and resigned myself to my fate. The foreign party was put into the carriage, in company with a large black leathern bag; and with a wild shriek, we started next minute on our twelve hours' journey.

Although the laws of politeness would not admit of my enjoying a weed, I was yet far from feeling anything but pleasure in the anticipation of my journey. It was something to be able to travel like a gentleman—by first-class, and in a costume that had about it nothing that could possibly remind me, or any one else, of the existence of such a person as my Lord Castleford. Indeed, I flatter myself that my quiet suit of tweeds was unsusceptible of improvement. I had brought with me a newspaper and a review, that being the proper thing to do when one travels first-class. As soon as we were fairly started, I replaced my shooting-hat with a comfortable Glen-garry, and disposed myself to cut the pages of my review. The little mahogany box which contained her Ladyship's jewel-case was in the net over my head. As we rolled out of the station, I gave an upward glance, just to satisfy myself as to its position and security, and repeated to myself his Lordship's last words: 'You have only one thing to bear specially in mind, Jasmin: should any one get into the same compartment with yourself, be careful that you don't go to sleep.' I smiled blandly to myself to think how unnecessary such a warning was in my case.

I did not fail every now and then to take a quiet observation of my travelling-companion. I was about to apply the word 'fair' to her, but that would be flattery of the grossest kind. A little brown woman, thin-faced, and with a nose that was much too large for her; with black hair, short and curling; and black eyes, small and restless, that seemed to sum up me and my belongings in a couple of glances, but whether correctly or not, I had no means then of knowing.

A Frenchwoman, evidently—I should have picked her out as such anywhere, even if I had not heard her speak—and with all a Frenchwoman's neatness of dress when she has to dress for any one besides her husband. Her garments were black, and although they were neither new nor expensive, there was a style about them which showed that she understood the art of dressing artistically. She was as restless and fidgety as any child could have been, and to sit perfectly still for two consecutive minutes was evidently one of those things which she had never thoroughly mastered. She arranged and re-arranged her dress; she took off her bonnet and put it on again, and did the same with her gloves. Then she smelled at her vinaigrette; then she let down the window, only to have the trouble of putting it up again a minute or two later. Then she protruded one of her neat little boots half-way from under the skirt of her dress, and gazed down at it admiringly; and this pleasing occupation kept her quiet for full five minutes. Suddenly she seemed to bethink herself of something which she had hitherto forgotten, and diving deep down into some mysterious pocket, she fished therefrom a gay little paper-box, which, on being opened, proved to be full of *bonbons*. These, with the most complacent air imaginable, she began to suck and munch slowly, one after another, with the evident intention of making them last her as long as possible.

My little Madame looked so amusingly like an old-fashioned school-girl as she munched her sweets, her large nose every now and then gave such a sniff of thorough enjoyment, that it was almost impossible to avoid laughing.

Looking up suddenly, she seemed to catch the twinkle in my eye. With a slight shrug, she thrust forward her box, saying as she did so: '*Eh bien! Monsieur* will perhaps oblige me by accepting a *bon-bon*.'

'Thanks—no. I'm afraid that I'm past the age of sweetmeats.'

'So much the worse for Monsieur!' with another shrug.

I could only bow a smiling assent to this assertion, and 'try back' with my review, which, upon my honour, I found terribly dry reading; and but for his Lordship's last request, I should certainly have been asleep in a few minutes. In order to keep myself wakeful, I let down the window, and sat watching the landscape for the next twenty miles, or rather what little of it could be seen by the dim starlight; filled with an unholy longing for a cigar, and dreaming a foolish dream about a certain young person who shall be nameless in the present company. I was brought back to time and place by an exclamation from Madame. '*Ah ciel! ma montre!*' holding up a tiny gold watch with an air of dismay. 'Somethings is the matter wiz it. It teeks no longer. Perhaps that it needs the repairs.' Here, with a shrug, she replaced the watch in her pocket.—'Will Monsieur have the *bonté* to tell me *quelle heure est-il?*'

We had been seated at opposite corners of the carriage up to this time, I with my face to the engine, she with her back to it; but as she asked this latter question, she skipped across the carriage, and plumped herself down in the seat directly in front of me. 'In spite of your coal-black curly hair, my dear Madame,' thought I, now that I had a closer view of her, 'and the wafer of rouge on each of your cheeks, you have not seen many short of fifty birthdays.' Then aloud as I looked at my watch: 'It wants exactly five minutes to twelve.'

'*Merci!* Perhaps Monsieur can tell me at what of the clock we shall reach Car—how you call it?—Carlisle?'

'We are due at Carlisle at twelve forty-seven,' answered I, after consulting my *Bradshaw*.

Madame repeated the words 'twelve forty-seven' in a tone of helpless bewilderment. I felt bound to translate the phrase into French for her; and when she found that I knew something of that elegant language (acquired, I need hardly say, on the continent), her delight seemed boundless. Now that the ice was fairly broken, we sat chatting together in pleasant mood, chiefly about Paris the adorable, till Carlisle was reached, and, for a few minutes, the train came to a stand. I glanced upward as the train rolled into the station. So far, her Ladyship's jewel-case was quite safe.

Two or three faces peered into the carriage while we were waiting, but no one joined us, and in a few minutes we were hurrying on again as rapidly as before. Scarcely had we started, when Madame said: 'Can Monsieur oblige me by telling me the name of the station at which we shall next stop, and how long we shall be before we reach it?'

'The next station is Oxenholme,' I replied, after again consulting my *Bradshaw*; 'and we shall reach it in an hour and a half from the present time.'

Madame smiled her thanks, and then lay back on her seat and closed her eyes. She either slept or pretended to sleep; and not another word passed between us till we flashed through the station at Penrith, and my watch told me it was half-past one.

Madame woke up with a slight yawn, retied her bonnet-strings, and adjusted her left eyebrow. Then with a little bow, and that artificial smile of hers which came and went so readily, she said: 'Monsieur smokes probably, and would not object to a cigarette?'

'Certainly not, Madame. No one loves a cigar better than I do,' I answered with alacrity. 'Is it possible that she herself is going to smoke?' was my unspoken thought.

My doubts were soon set at rest. '*Monsieur est très-bon,*' she said; and with that she pulled out a prettily embroidered case, and opening it, shewed it to be full of long thin cigars, one of which she picked out, and proceeded to light with all the ease of a veteran smoker.

I am afraid that I stared at her more than was consistent with good-manners, but it was the first time

I had seen a woman smoke since I parted from the old dame who sold me nuts and apples when a school-boy.

'Monsieur will oblige me by accepting one,' she said, holding out her case after she had taken two or three whiffs at her own weed. 'These are not ordinary cigars. They are made expressly for ladies, of mild aromatic tobacco. It is possible that Monsieur may not like them so well as his own cigars; but at least he can try them, and tell me how he finds the flavour.'

I was quite prepared to enjoy a smoke, however vile the tobacco might be, and began to think my little Frenchwoman a very pleasant person indeed. In another minute we were puffing away, one against the other, like two small chimneys. 'Perhaps Madame would like to have one of the windows down?' I said as the atmosphere began to thicken.

'*Ah, non, non!*' cried Madame energetically. 'The night is so cold, and I suffer so much from pains in the chest. Monsieur will please not open either of the windows.'

I could only smile and obey. 'If she can stand the smoke, surely I can,' was my thought; and with that I gave myself up to the quiet enjoyment of my cigar.

But did I enjoy it? Madame had said truly when she spoke of it as composed of a peculiar tobacco. There was something very peculiar about it. It was tobacco certainly, but of a sort that I had never smoked before, having a pungent aromatic herb-like flavour about it that, in itself, might not have been disagreeable, but which seemed utterly out of place when associated with one's idea of a good cigar.

'The cigar—I hope that Monsieur finds it to his liking?' said Madame after we had puffed away in silence for a little while.

'Delightful, Madame: the finest cigar I ever smoked,' answered I with all the insincerity of your thorough man of the world. Madame's expansive smile came and went like a stage-trick as I gave utterance to my little fib.

Really, the atmosphere was becoming very cloudy, not that it mattered to me, of course, so long as my companion was suited. There was something very soothing, *very far niente* about that cigar of Madame's; something that disposed one to reverie and castle-building, and put far out of sight, as things that did not concern one, all the cares and troubles of everyday life. A delicious calm seemed to be stealing over my faculties.

It was very smoky in the carriage, certainly, by this time. Not that I cared a jot about it, but how my little snuff-brown Frenchwoman could enjoy it as she apparently did, was a mystery. To me there was nothing disagreeable about the smoke except that it made my eyes smart; but that could be easily obviated by shutting them; and as Madame seemed to be in no humour for conversation, I might as well keep them shut as open for the present.—Yes; that was decidedly better.

I opened my eyes for a moment once or twice, only to see Madame's witch-like face dimly through the smoke-wreaths. She was still opposite to me, and was puffing away at her second cigar, although, as yet, I had smoked but little more than half my first. My eyes would not keep open more than a moment at a time; the lids seemed to close heavily of their own accord. In the roar and rush of the hurrying train, I fancied that I could detect an under-tone, a minor chord, a something that brought back strangely to my recollection the brawling of the little mill-stream near the home where I was born. I heard it dashing noisily over the stones and leaping the weir, and saw again the great flashing wheel go round, green, besprent with moss and water-drops; with flickering trout in the shallows further down, leaping at the flies that skimmed the surface of the stream.

All these things I saw again as clearly as I had ever seen them in reality. I saw, too, my father, burly man, all white with flour, come out of the mill, and heard his cheery call for Kelpie, his dog, which came bounding after him next moment, barking and quarrelling with its own tail. Then I heard my father say: 'Bob's dead—a good riddance.' But I was not dead. In my ears, there was presently a low humming noise, a sound that shaped itself by degrees into the refrain of a cradle-song of which in my waking moments I had retained no recollection, but which now came to me as the song with which my mother had hushed me to sleep when I lay a child in her arms. I felt the conscious part of me gliding into unconsciousness under the soothing sweetness of this old tune, but I had neither power nor inclination to wish it otherwise.

When I regained my senses, it was to find myself still in the railway carriage, and still hurrying through the night at headlong speed—but alone. I rubbed my eyes, pulled myself together, and stared around. On the floor, where it had dropped from my fingers, was the burnt-out end of my cigar. One of the windows was open, and the fresh air was pouring in, but the peculiar fragrance of the smoke was still perceptible. When and how had my travelling-companion left me? We must have stopped at Oxenholme during the time I was so foolishly asleep, and doubtless that was where she had quitted the train. What was the subtle agent worked up into the composition of those infernal cigars that sent me off to sleep as soundly as if—

Great heavens! the jewel-case!

With a thrill of terror and despair, I saw that it was gone.

I was never so near going mad as I was during the next few minutes. My first act, as soon as some touch of reason had come back to me, was to search every nook and cranny of the carriage in the insane hope that it might be hidden in some impossible corner. Then I looked at my watch, and tried to steady my mind while I ascertained from my *Bradshaw* when and where we should stop next. The time was just twenty-five minutes past two, and we were due in Lancaster at seven minutes before three. There was not much time for thinking: it was needful to act, and that without a moment's delay. I actually seemed to freeze with terror when I thought of what Lord Castleford would say and do when he should come to hear of his loss. It was a thought that spurred me to immediate action. Evidently, my first object must be to induce the driver of the train to pull up at the nearest station, from which point I must make my way back to Oxenholme as I best could, and there try to track the thief. But how was I to communicate with the driver, and tell him what I wanted? That was precisely one of those things which English railway companies take care to put it out of the power of their passengers to do. Nevertheless, in the present instance it must be done. I knew that I might shout out of the window till I was black in the face without being heard further than the next carriage. The only plan I could think of was to go to the driver. I had, on one or two occasions, seen a guard pass along the outside of the carriages from end to end of a train while it was going at full speed, and, my necessity being so great, there was no reason why I should not do the same thing. I opened the door, and put one foot on to the step, and then my nerve nearly failed me. We were rushing through the night at such a tremendous pace, we were cutting the wind so fiercely, that I was fairly frightened. Standing thus with one foot on the step, I presently took fresh nerve from the recollection of what I had lost; so drawing in my breath, and turning my face from the wind, I stepped boldly down on to the board that runs from end to end of all railway carriages, about a

foot below the steps, and shut the door of my compartment after me. For a full minute I did not stir an inch, but standing on the footboard, held fast with both hands to the thin iron bar placed shoulder-high along the side of the carriage. As soon as I had in some measure accustomed myself to the position, I began to advance cautiously, step by step, towards the front of the train. I managed very well till I reached the end of the first carriage, but here there was a dangerous gap to be crossed before the next one could be reached. After a moment's hesitation, this difficulty was safely surmounted, and with gathered confidence in myself, I now passed cautiously but swiftly forward on my way to the engine. One after one, three carriages were safely passed, and there remained only one other carriage, and the guard's van, between myself and the end of my dangerous journey. As I passed the first compartment of the fourth carriage, my eyes met those of a man who was at that moment, with his face turned full to the window, in the act of lighting a cigar. In an instant his head and shoulders were out of the window, and I felt myself grasped tightly by the collar.

'Hullo! my fine friend, where are you a-wandering to?' cried the stranger.

'For Heaven's sake, don't delay me!' I exclaimed. 'I've been robbed, and I want the engine-driver to stop the train and let me down, so that I may hurry back after my property.'

'You just come in here for a little while,' said the man; and almost before I knew what had happened, I found the door opened, and myself safe in the compartment with the stranger and his companion. I was about to protest, when the stranger stopped me. 'Now, you just look here,' he said. 'You have been robbed, and you want to go back—to Oxenholme, I suppose. Now, your best plan is just to go quietly on to Lancaster. We shall be there in a quarter of an hour. You can easily get a lift back from there by a train of some sort, and in half the time that it would take you to obtain a trap at any of these little roadside places, and drive back by road. Am I right, or any other man?'

This was a view of the case that had entirely escaped me, and I saw at once that I could not do better than adopt it.

'Look you here, now,' he added, holding up an impressive forefinger. 'Shall I tell you by whom you have been robbed?'

'You cannot surely do that!' I exclaimed.

'I think I can. Mind, I merely say *I think*. Unless I am greatly mistaken, you have been robbed by a little Frenchwoman, who got into the same compartment with yourself at Edinburgh, and who seemed to be behaving herself as a respectable person ought to during the few minutes we stayed at Carlisle: I had a look in at you both just before we started again. Am I right or wrong in my guess?'

'You are quite right. But how do you happen to know all this?'

'It is part of my business to make myself acquainted with such trifles.'

'Who are you, and where do you come from, may I ask?'

'Well, my place of business is in Great Scotland Yard, London. As for my name, you will find it on that slip of pasteboard;' and he handed me a card.

'It seems to me that, as circumstances now are, I could scarcely have fallen into better hands,' I said.

'Sir, you flatter me,' he answered with a grave bow.

'But the little Frenchwoman,' said I; 'pray, what do you know of her?'

'I know her to be one of the downiest and most artful swindlers between Edinburgh and Penzance, and in close league with some of the biggest scoundrels in the kingdom. I just gave her a look at Carlisle to see that she was after no mischief; but I certainly

thought that we should have the pleasure of her company up to town, and had no idea that she would leave us at Oxenholme.—And now, as we shall be at Lancaster in five minutes, you had better give me an outline of your little affair.

In a couple of minutes, my new-found friend had got everything out of me that it was requisite for him to know. He gave a long low whistle when I had answered his last question, and looked very grave. 'As clever a little stroke of business as ever I heard of!' he said admiringly. 'I thought she had merely taken your watch and purse, and perhaps a silver-mounted dressing-case, or some trifle of that kind. But Lady Castleford's diamonds! A serious case—very. Of course, it was a regular "plant" her travelling in the same carriage with you. That is a point that may be worth inquiring into later on. Equally, of course, the cigar she gave you contained a powerful narcotic. You became unconscious somewhere between Penrith and Oxenholme, and your senses came back to you a few minutes after you left the latter place, which was the only station at which the train stopped in the interim. The inference therefore is, that our little Madame left you during the two minutes we stopped there, taking, by mistake, some of your property with her. We will go back to Oxenholme together, my friend. This case interests me immensely, and I should like to have the fingering of it.'

Three minutes later, we were at Lancaster. My friend the inspector said a few words in private to his companion, who was going forward to Euston, and then he and I quitted the train, together with three or four other passengers: the remainder were all going further south.

'This train will be off in two or three minutes,' said the inspector, 'and we will then make some inquiry as to the readiest mode of getting back to Oxenholme.' With that, he left me standing a yard or two from the shut-up bookstall, and strolled leisurely along the platform by himself, taking silent note of everything after his fashion at all times and places. Hardly knowing what I was about, for my mind was utterly absorbed with the thought of my great loss, I wandered slowly through the entrance-hall, and so to the outside of the station, where I found three or four cabs, the drivers of which were touting eagerly among the few passengers disgorged by the train. Two of these passengers shouldered their modest luggage, and set off on foot. One, a stylishly dressed middle-aged lady, called for a cab; another, a commercial traveller with numerous boxes, called for a cab; and a third, a very decrepit and infirm old gentleman, also called for a cab; by which time the passengers were exhausted. I turned to re-enter the station, and, to my surprise, found the inspector at my elbow.

'Get into that cab,' he said, indicating the only one now disengaged.

I obeyed without a word. My new friend having first said a word or two to the driver of the cab into which the infirm old gentleman had been assisted, spoke next to the driver of the cab I had engaged, and then himself got into the vehicle. Next minute, the four cabs were racing from the station as hard as they could go. Two of them turned off in different directions before we had gone very far, but we seemed to be following the third one, which kept a short way ahead of us.

'The meaning of this?' I said to the inspector. 'Wait, and ask no questions. Presently you will learn.'

Our ride was soon over. The foremost cab drew up by the side of a building that most closely looked like anything rather than a hotel, and in another minute we also stopped a yard or two behind it. My friend was out of the cab in a moment, and I was not long in following him. The old gentleman, with his head protruded through the cab-window, was saying

to the driver: 'This is not a hotel. What for you bring me here?' The sound of his voice startled me as if I had been shot.

'The driver was instructed to bring you here. This is the hotel at which you are expected,' said my Scotland Yard friend as he stepped quietly forward. 'Will you be good enough to alight?'

'I will not alight, as you call it. I demand to go on my journey.'

'No more nonsense, *Madame!*' said the inspector sternly. 'Can't you see that the game's up? Take the matter quietly—it will be your best plan. Allow me to offer you my arm.'

Madame—for she it was—gave a gasp and a little cry, and her face, even through the paint and powder, turned as white as that of a corpse. But there was something about the inspector's politeness that would not be denied. The cab-door was opened. As Madame alighted, the inspector drew her hand within his arm, and together they entered the police-station, that being the place he had instructed the cabman to drive to.

When Madame's large fur-collared cloak had been thrown aside, and she had been despoiled of her spectacles and white wig and moustache, there could not be the slightest doubt as to her identity with the woman who had travelled with me from Edinburgh to Oxenholme. On leaving me insensible at the latter station (as she afterwards confessed), she had got into an empty compartment of the same train, and had there, while on the road to Lancaster, effected her disguise, judging that no one would suppose otherwise than that she had quitted the train at Oxenholme. Besides which, she felt confident that no ordinary eyes would detect her under her changed appearance. Fortunately, the inspector's eyes were not ordinary ones, so that, as that gentleman himself put it: 'Madame was bowled out as clean as a whistle.'

The jewel-case was found intact in her black leathern bag. Later in the day, I was allowed to proceed with it on my journey, so that her *Ladyship* was not disappointed after all; in fact, she was not told till a week or two afterwards how near she had been to losing her diamonds for ever.

As for that clever old Frenchwoman, whom I could not help pitying, in spite of the trick she had played me, she was sentenced at the following assizes to seven years' imprisonment; but I heard afterwards that she died before the expiration of her term. She could not be induced to say by what means she had obtained her information respecting my journey to London, and the valuable property committed to my charge; but it was noticed as somewhat singular that the butler to the gentleman at whose house Lord Castleford was staying disappeared immediately after the robbery without saying a word to any one, and was not heard of again.

'Butler!' ejaculated Mr Glassford with indignation, almost before the valet could conclude his narrative, and thereby intercepting its meed of applause; 'I never heard of a butler being mixed up in such affairs. It is *my* experience' (nothing could exceed the pomposity of Mr Glassford's style) 'that persons in that responsible situation are treated with confidence, and repay it with faithful duty. It is not only wine, let me tell you, and gold and silver plate as they have to take care of, but sometimes the honour of noble families is committed to their'—

'Silence for Mr Glassford's story,' exclaimed Tom with prompt decision, and although the Butler—the full proportions of his florid rhetoric thus rudely shorn—somewhat swelled and purpled, he obeyed.

THE BUTLER'S STORY.

HEATH HALL, in the county Surrey, was, I may say, my first situation, and my master was Sir Edward Beauclark, Baronet.

It was a handsome place, though rather solitary, standing, as it did, in the moorland part of the county, which was quiet enough then, there being no camp at Aldershot, ten miles from the little town of Farnham, and something further from any gentleman's seat. But the house, though an old one, was comfortable, and had rooms that might serve a lord. Sir Edward had put it in complete repair, and spent no end of money on the gardens and pleasure-grounds which lay round it; not to speak of making walks, and arbours, and fountains at every turn in the great park beyond, which, for wide extent and noble trees, was nothing short of a forest. It was a good place for a butler, too. Sir Edward kept very respectable servants, no late hours, and not too much company: there was just enough to keep the place lively, and make it worth one's while. The dining-room was convenient for serving; the sideboard had an advantageous situation; but what I particularly admired was, that, owing to something in the build of the old house, my bedroom, my pantry, and the wine-cellar were all by themselves at the end of a passage, shut off from the rest, when I liked to close the door, and communicating with the grand hall by a little stair of their own. Everything was allowed on the most liberal scale, for Sir Edward was young, and said to be rich; but though he had made a good many acquaintances, my master was a stranger in the county Surrey. His family estate lay far away in Cornwall, where he had been born, but never lived since his childhood, having lost his father and mother early; and being their only son, he had spent many years, as young gentlemen do, first at Eton, and then at Cambridge; got married as soon as he came of age, and after his wedding, went to the continent, where he had been travelling, I can't say how long. But about three months before I came into his service, Sir Edward came back to England, bought Heath Hall, repaired and improved it, as I have said; and brought Lady Beauclark and Master Philip, his only son and heir, home to his new mansion.

He is long gone, poor gentleman, but I remember him well. A tall handsome man he was, with a rather brown complexion, black hair, and a look that had something high and haughty in it, though he was affable and kind to all about him. Master Philip was his very image, and an uncommon sharp boy, but only in his fourth year: had he been older, maybe things would not have happened as they did through his prattle. But it is Lady Beauclark that I remember best. She was a born beauty: her hair was like gold; and her cheek was like marble, with the softest tinge of the May-rose on it: woman never had lovelier features, and her smile would have made a man forget his troubles. Mrs Pickering, her maid, who was downright plain, and had designs on me—there was no end of her errands to the pantry—told me in a great secret that she had not been born a lady, which I couldn't believe, for there was not a sign or look of the beggar on horseback about her, and few got-up people but will shew some of it. Lady Beauclark was as considerate as generous, and as charitable as the best-born gentlewoman could be; and for speech and manner, I am sure she matched any lady in the county—even our present mistress here. For all that, Mrs Pickering's tale was true. I heard the rights of it afterwards from Sir Edward's valet, who had been with him years before he was married. Lady Beauclark had been a dressmaker's apprentice in London, when Sir Edward first saw her, by mere accident, in one of his visits to town. Her

beauty had taken him captive, the valet said; and being a real good gentleman, and in true love, he first made her his Lady, and then took her with him to the continent, to get schooled and taught by all sorts of masters, before he introduced her to the gentlefolks in England.

She had learned well—the valet allowed that; and I suppose he knew, having travelled so much abroad; at anyrate, Sir Edward saw no cause to be ashamed of her, which must have been a great comfort, for he was as proud as he looked. I found that out myself, and the valet certified it, saying at the same time what a good thing it was that my Lady had no relations to keep off. 'You see, Glassford,' said he, 'Sir Edward could never stand the like, and it would come to disturbance; but, thank Providence, my Lady was an orphan, without father, mother, brother, or sister, as she told him; and so did the dressmaker she was apprenticed with, many a day before the wedding one.' Sir Edward's pride got no offence, and his love had not cooled. Never was there a more fond or attentive husband: he would go on no excursion or pleasure without Lady Beauclark—his Honor, as he called her in private: her grand name was Honoria; and when business took him from home, he lost no time in getting back to her side. Nobody sees more of family ways than a butler: my observation at the sideboard and behind the chairs made me sure enough that the love-match of my master and mistress had never changed, like some that I have heard of and seen, for that matter; but for all her beauty, her grace, and her good-fortune, there was something about Lady Beauclark which I could not understand, and did not think it safe to mention even to my friend the valet.

She had troubles of her own, strange and silent ones, which my Lady was determined to keep to herself. When a shadow crossed her path, or a door opened suddenly, she would start, and turn white with fear, though it was but for the moment; and I saw her at times, when she thought no eye was upon her, cast such frightened looks out of the window, and up the long glades of the park, as if she expected to see a ghost among their tall trees. She stood in fear of Sir Edward; I knew it by the way she used to inquire about his goings out and comings in, and by the care she took never to go out of the house while he was in it; but she seemed as fond of him as he was of her, and I don't believe that it was for his wealth or his title that she married him. Whatever troubled her, he knew nothing about it; but there was a picture over the mantelpiece in the dining-room which must have had something to do with it—it was that of a lady in an old-fashioned evening-dress, young, and resembling Sir Edward; but the style of face and figure which looked so well in the man took a gaunt squareness in the woman. I noticed that my master often looked at that picture lovingly and sadly, as if it were the image of a dear lost friend; but my mistress took particular pains to keep her eyes off it, and when they did fall on it by accident, the same look of terror passed over her face that I had seen when the door suddenly opened or she glanced up the park; and once I heard the sharp little Master Philip say to her: 'What bad thing did grandmamma do, that you don't like to look at her picture?' Sir Edward was not in the room; and Lady Beauclark made the child no answer, but stroked down his hair, that was so much darker than her own, and bade him look out of the window at a herd of deer that came trooping down the park just in time to take Master Philip's attention.

Butlers are never expected to see or hear anything that does not concern the service, and of course I didn't; but I took the very first opportunity to ask the valet, in a careless, quiet way, whose picture it was that hung over the mantelpiece. 'Sir Edward's mother,' said he: 'the old Lady Beauclark, we call

her now, though she came to her death young enough, poor lady.'

'Did she die early, then?' said I.

'Oh, you haven't heard the story, being from Yorkshire, and it's not much spoken of now; but it made noise enough in the west country when it happened, I can tell you. Sir Edward was quite a child at the time—in his seventh year, they say. I heard it all from Mrs Flood, the old housekeeper at Ashcliff—that's Sir Edward's estate in Cornwall; a wild out-of-the-world place, close upon the sea, but standing so high above it that the rocks on that side are as steep as a wall; and I don't know how many feet below—but it must be some hundreds—there lies a rough, stony beach, covered fathoms deep at high water, and on it many a good ship has gone to pieces in the Cornwall storms. Ashcliff House stands some way off, in a sheltered hollow. A fine old mansion it is, handsomely finished and furnished, though left to old Mrs Flood and a few servants as gray as herself, for near eighteen years. You see, Sir Edward's father died two years after his Lady, and my master could never be got to live there at all; indeed, I don't think he likes to go to Ashcliff, even on business, and for my part, I don't wonder at it. The old Lady Beauclark has a grand, proud look like himself in that picture of hers, though she's not quite so handsome; but by all accounts, she was a fond and careful mother to him, and would scarcely let her only boy out of her sight night or day. But Lady Beauclark had a maid a great deal better-looking than her mistress—everybody allows who can remember them both. She was vain of her good looks, too, though they had not brought her much advantage. Mrs Gynne—that was her name—had left a family on the other side of the county, in whose house she had been brought up, being a charity-girl, as I was told, on account of a misfortune she had with a London gentleman who used to visit there. Nobody about Ashcliff knew of that business but the gamekeeper's wife, who had come from the same parish, and thought it her duty not to meddle with a matter of reputation; but she said, long after, that, in her opinion, it was not vanity that had led Gynne astray, so much as the saying of a gipsy fortune-teller, who once told her at one of the country-fairs, that either her son or her grandson—the gamekeeper's wife was not sure which—would be heir to one of the best estates in the county. She was a very sensible woman, that gamekeeper's wife—I ought to call her Mrs Johnson—and Sir Edward has brought her son to be gamekeeper here, I mean the young man you were speaking to yesterday when he came with the pheasants. By the by, that's a lonely place where his cottage stands far up among the pines; but he has brought home a wife, I understand, and folks don't mind lonely places when they get married.

'Well, as I was saying, the gipsy's prophecy helped Gynne to forget herself in one situation, and it was commonly thought that the same thing made her take a mighty notion of her master in another. Sir Edward's father—he was called Sir Edward, too; it's a family name among the Beauclarks—was as fine-looking man as his son, but very unlike him in other respects, being given to all manner of field-sports, and rather fond of a joke. He saw the pretty face of his lady's-maid, I suppose; but every one allowed he was not taken by it, and there was nothing wrong between them; but the airs she took on, and the snares she laid for him, entertained the jovial baronet; and by way of amusing himself, and sometimes his company, he used to talk stuff, and make-believe to be smitten, when Lady Beauclark was out of the way. These jokes of his made the silly maid imagine—at least so it was thought afterwards, for Gynne was uncommonly deep and close—that nothing but her mistress stood between her and the style and station of my Lady. How long she had been thinking of it,

nobody could tell, or what put it in her head at that moment—of course, it's always said to be the Old One that does the like—but one morning, when Lady Beauclark had gone up to the rocks to gather mosses and sea-plants, about which she was curious, and taken with her a basket to carry them home, Gynne watched her opportunity, and as her mistress stooped over the steep to pluck some rare plant out of a crevice, she gave her a tremendous push, and sent the poor lady crashing down on the stony beach below.

'They say she never uttered word or cry; but little Edward, now our master, had stolen out of the nursery, and followed his mother, unknown to either her or the maid, and came in sight just as the push was given. His shrieks were so loud and wild that they heard them in Ashcliff House, and rushed out to see what was the matter; but before any one reached the spot, Gynne had fled down the rocks and over the moor beyond. They went round by the sea-path, and took up the lady; but she was dead; and Mrs Flood told me there were few of her bones not broken. The child was old enough to tell plainly what he had seen, and the maid was searched for by all the police in the county: no pains were spared in advertising and offering rewards, but no trace of her was ever discovered; and the general belief is, that having seen that unexpected witness of her crime, she escaped the law by drowning herself in one of the moorland lakes. At anyrate, Gynne was never heard of more; and Sir Edward is believed to have repented bitterly of his unlucky jesting with her. After the death of his Lady, he was never the same man, in either health or spirits; and they laid him by her side, in the family vault, within two years.'

The valet's story was a strange one, but it did not satisfy my mind regarding my Lady's dislike or fear to look at the picture. Mothers and daughters-in-law have no good agreement at times, in the best families; but she could have known nothing about the lady that was murdered twenty years before, being little above twenty herself. I kept a close mouth on the subject, however, for, besides that a butler shouldn't take notice of anything that passes up-stairs, I wouldn't have made a remark against Lady Beauclark to the best man in England. I have served many a titled lady since, some of them more grandly dressed, though she wanted for nothing, and all of them higher born, but none of them half so handsome, and none of them half so kind. My Lady was good to everybody, as I have said; but to me she was past the common, maybe, because I came most in her way, maybe, because I was the youngest of the upper servants, rather too young for a butler, which is a weighty office, considering the plate and the wine-cellar. Lady Beauclark would never see a fault in me, or let anybody else see one, if she could help it. Many a time, when Sir Edward was out of hearing, she warned me against little matters that might have offended his stately stomach—like most proud people, he was rather easily put out—and she did it all in such a wise and kindly way, that no sensible young man could have had a foolish thought about it. So my mind was made up, that whatever I found out, and however it concerned him, Sir Edward should know nothing about it from me, and neither should his valet, who would be sure enough to tell him. But as the autumn wore on, Sir Edward got business which took him from home longer and oftener than every one said he had been since his marriage. Lord Hampshire, one of his county acquaintances, prevailed on him to stand for the borough of Brickley, in which his Lordship had a great command of votes, at the general election, which then kept the country in a ferment never to be seen or heard of in these days, for it was just before the passing of the first Reform Bill.

Brickley was a hundred miles off; and Sir Edward

having to be there canvassing and speech-making, not to speak of meeting committees in London and dining with Lord Hampshire, was away for weeks together. He wrote to my Lady every day: such a coming of letters I never saw, and she seemed glad to get them; but I observed, that as soon as Sir Edward went, the gamekeeper, Johnson, had errands to the Hall more than usual. Sometimes he brought game that had not been ordered, sometimes he wanted very trifling things, but he always lingered about the house or grounds till he could get a private word of my Lady; and once I saw her in the shrubbery talking earnestly with him, and giving him what appeared to be a small bundle of clothes. By and by, Lady Beauclark began to take long walks in the park: she went out in the most chilly days, when it was threatening to rain every minute—many a heavy shower she got—and stayed away for hours, to the great disturbance of Master Philip, whom she would never allow to go with her; and it was the first thing I ever knew her to refuse him; indeed, between Sir Edward and her, there was not a better spoiled boy in Surrey: he had his own way in breaking, damaging, and upsetting things generally, and always sat at the dinner-table, even when they had company. The nurse and nursery-maid had a rare business pacifying and amusing him when his mother went out on those long walks. I believe Lady Beauclark made it worth their while; but herself always came home tired and fagged, and looking as if she had been at a funeral. There was something hidden and hard to bear about those weary walks: I knew it not only by my Lady's look when she came in, but by the deep brow-studies into which she used to fall over her harp or book, and sit there, without reading or playing, till a door creaked, or a shadow passed the window, and then she would start and turn white with sudden fear. I was curious, of course; but that was not all that concerned me. Out of the respect I had for her, I would have given my place—and it was not a bad one—to know Lady Beauclark's trouble, and be of service to her in it; and I envied the gamekeeper because he was evidently in her confidence. At last, he came one day for wire to make snares for the weasels, which, he said, were hundreds strong, and would leave Sir Edward and his friends no game to shoot; but he made a sign to my Lady in the drawing-room window, as he was going away, and waited at the end of the avenue till she got her things on, and Master Philip coaxed off, and I watched them walking together through the park, in the direction of Johnson's cottage.

Before Lady Beauclark returned, Sir Edward came home: he was surprised to find her out, for the day had become a downright wet one; and after walking from window to window for an hour and more, he had just got ready an overcoat and umbrella to go in search of her, when my Lady came back. She was drenched to the skin, but looked less sad and weary than I had seen her for many a day, and told Sir Edward, in such an unconcerned way, that she had walked as far as the pines, when the rain overtook and made her wait in Johnson's cottage till a fair hour came; but another terrible shower had fallen on her as she was hurrying home. He prophesied all sorts of colds and rheumatisms—it was his way of shewing care and displeasure—but that evening she was herself again, as if a great burden had been lifted off her mind, and chatted gaily with Sir Edward, who was also in high feather, for he had gained his election in Brickley. That election made a busier man of him than ever he had been in my time: henceforth, Sir Edward was taken up with parliament business and people, preparing for the session, which was to begin early; shooting with Lord Hampshire's friends and supporters in his own preserves every morning, having them all to dinner every evening, with a wonderful amount of talk and papers, and a still more wonderful quantity of wine. It was

entertaining, for a discreet person at the sideboard, to hear their high and mighty talk about interests and principles; but I suppose the like always goes on among parliament-people. At anyrate, Sir Edward and his new friends were uncommon powerful men about an hour after dinner. As far as I remember, they were all of the Tory persuasion; and I am not sure that my master didn't think he could throw out the Reform Bill himself.

Lady Beauclark seemed to have done with her trouble and her fear. If she didn't think Sir Edward the greatest man in the world after winning the Brickley election, she listened to him as if he had been such, sitting like the very image of Patience, while he held on telling her all he would do, and all that everybody should do, and reading papers full of figures that would have tired an angel; but she stood it all to please him, and then he took his friends into corners, and told them what an understanding Lady Beauclark had. Christmas was coming on by this time; it was a fine open season, with no snow and little frost, and the county gentlemen took greatly to the hunting. Lord Hampshire was a great follower of the hounds; and having got Sir Edward into parliament, he got him into the hunt too. That took my master as much from home as the election had done, or rather more: he was always spending the evening at one country-seat or other, being far from Heath Hall, and pressed to stay for dinner.

He left her for a longer time at the beginning of the week before Christmas; an uncommon number of letters had come overnight; and I heard him tell her at the breakfast-table, in his grandest manner, that the leader of his party—I forget what lord it was—had summoned him to attend a meeting of members at his residence in Belgrave Square, to arrange their plan of action for the approaching session of parliament; and that the Surrey hunt were to meet at Lord Hampshire's villa on the Thames the Tuesday after; so he would stay at the Conservative Club in town, of which he had lately become a member. The Club was such a great convenience to a man in public life; and Lady Beauclark said no doubt it was, but she sighed as she spoke; and Master Philip looked up from his chocolate with: 'Papa, I wish there were no hunts and no parliament; they are always taking you away from mamma and me.'

'You will be going to hunt and to parliament some day yourself, my boy,' said Sir Edward, stroking the child's hair; and he went off to get ready for his journey to London. I heard him tell my Lady that he would certainly be back on Christmas-morning at furthest, in good time to go to church with her, which, it seems, he had never missed doing on that day; and she was to let him know, as soon as their letters reached her, how many of his Cornish cousins were coming to spend Christmas at Heath Hall. Away he went; and I felt for her poor Ladyship, as she stood in the porch looking after him and his hunter till they were out of sight; but she had never said a word against his going; and her maid told me that her whole concern was to get everything comfortable and correct for his Cornish cousins. They were coming in great force, it appeared, a day or two after, when the expected letters arrived, and the whole house, from my Lady down to the kitchen-maid, were busy with preparations for them; but somehow it didn't suit a single one of them to come an hour sooner than Christmas-morning. They were all to be expected about the same time as Sir Edward: you see the way was long, and travelling at that time was not exactly what it is now, for railways had only begun in the north, and I'm not sure that there were any in Cornwall.

Well, the preparations were all made on Christmas-eve. The day had turned out uncommon wet, and I was standing at the window of my own room waiting

till a heavy shower would pass, and I and the rest of the men-servants could go out to cut down holly and other evergreens, not to speak of the mistletoe, for the decorating of the Hall, as both my Lady and Sir Edward were partial to old country customs. The winter twilight was falling; but my window overlooked the shrubbery, which was separated from the park only by a wooden paling, getting rather crazy, and at one corner broken through. I thought at first that it was a great black dog I saw coming over that broken-down corner, and keeping close in the shadow of the shrubs as it crept towards the house; but in a minute or two I found out that it was an old woman in black clothes, considerably stooped, and evidently not intending to be seen. She was none of the neighbours or poor people who came to the Hall for kitchen-leavings or my Lady's charity: I had never seen her before, and one who had could not have forgotten her face, it was so wrinkled and haggard, with a look that was between cunning madness and sore trouble in it. I didn't like her appearance; and I wondered what she meant by stealing on to the house in that fashion; and as she turned into a little path leading directly to the conservatory, which opened into my Lady's drawing-room, I thought it prudent to go round by the back-door quietly, and see what the old woman wanted. I had got close on the path, which was thickly shaded with laurels, now all drenched and dripping with rain, when I heard voices talking behind them, and peeping through the leaves, I saw the old woman and my Lady, who must have seen her approach, and have rushed down through the conservatory, for the door stood open, and my Lady's face was as white as any cloth that I ever laid.

'What made you come at such a time?' she cried, wringing her hands. 'It is Christmas-eve; the servants will be all out cutting evergreens, as soon as the rain is over; Sir Edward will come home to-morrow, with all his friends from Cornwall. Oh, what made you come?'

'Because I could live no longer without seeing you, Honor,' said the old woman, speaking in a whisper too; but it was hoarse and hollow. 'I could, when the sea was between us, but I can't now. I am growing foolish, mad may be, after living so many years with a rope about my neck. Only for your sake, I would go to the first policeman I saw, and let the hangman give it a pull, and finish me. You may treat me like a dog, Honor; you may send me away to the gamekeeper's cottage, where they don't much like to give me room, or let me lie in the wet park; but to see you a grand lady is all the pleasure I have in this world, and I don't know where I'm going in the next.'

The rain was falling fast, but Lady Beauclark's tears were falling faster. She took the old woman kindly by the hand, led her up the steps, and into the conservatory, carefully closing the door; while I, not knowing what to make of the business, stepped back the way I had come. I had scarcely got in, when my Lady's bell rang, and I went up to her dressing-room. She met me at the door, with, 'Glassford, I want you to bring up a cold fowl and a bottle of wine, and anything else you can think of that would serve a hungry person. Don't be a minute; and do me the favour to say nothing about it or what you see in my room.'

'Not a soul shall know anything of what I see or hear, my Lady,' said I. It was the proudest moment of my life, that I could do something to serve her; and the best fowl the cook had roasted for the Cornish cousins' luncheon, and a bottle of the best port in Sir Edward's cellar, went up on my tray to that old woman who had come creeping through the shrubbery.

'Come in,' said Lady Beauclark, when I knocked at the dressing-room door; and there was the strange

visitor, sure enough, seated in my Lady's own easy-chair, beside the blazing fire. Its warm light shewed more plainly the deep wrinkles and odd look of her face, her gray neglected hair, and clothes all drenched with rain and mud, though otherwise in good condition. Lady Beauclark was drying her wet things, and serving her as if she had been her maid.—By the by, Mrs Pickering had got a holiday, and was not to come home till next morning, which I thought the mercy of Providence; for that visitor in her mistress's dressing-room would have served her for a twelvemonth's talking; no steam-engine ever could beat the tongues of them ladies' maids. 'Let nobody come up here but yourself, Glassford,' said my Lady in a whisper, as I was laying the tray.

'Won't you eat with me, Honor?' said the old woman, and her voice made me nearly spill the wine. Queer as it was when she whispered, it was ten times worse when she spoke aloud. But at the same minute, I heard the gate-bell ring, and then a sound of horses' hoofs and rolling wheels coming up the avenue.

'See who it is, and let me know as quickly as you can,' said Lady Beauclark; and I rushed out just in time to hear Sir Edward's voice at the hall-door, saying: 'Come in, come in; we are all before our time; but good things never come too soon; I dare say we shall all be welcome.'

My Lady had heard the voice, too, and was close behind me as I turned to tell her. The old woman was there, too, shaking like a leaf in the wind; and I never saw such a face of terror. 'Hide her in your pantry, for God's sake,' said my Lady.

'The plate is there, and I can't keep the cook out,' said I, my hair beginning to rise with fear, for I saw there was something dangerous in the business.

'In the wine-cellar, then; nobody goes there but yourself,' said my Lady; but at that moment, there was a loud call for 'Glassford' from Sir Edward. 'Give me the key,' and she took it out of my fingers. 'Now, shut the dining-room door when you go in.'

I flew down stairs: Sir Edward was in the dining-room, and all the house in a bustle with the arrival of the Cornish cousins. He had found it convenient to come home that evening; they had got over ground quicker than they expected; and the master of Heath Hall had met his Christmas visitors on the borders of his own domain.

'You have got up no holly, Glassford,' said he: 'how is that?'

'The rain prevented us, sir,' said I.

'Where is Lady Beauclark?'

'In her own room, dressing, sir.'

'Well, send somebody to tell her that my cousins and I have come together. Send the valet to me, for I must dress too; and tell the cook to get us the best and the quickest dinner she can.'

I ran to execute Sir Edward's commands. My Lady passed me on her way up-stairs, and slipped the key of the wine-cellar into my hand. But I saw that Master Philip was holding fast by her dress, and looking backwards down the little stair leading to my premises, as if he had just escaped from the nursery in time to see something wonderful in that direction.

Unexpected arrivals were easily provided for in Heath Hall, for there was plenty of everything as well as room; and the Cornish cousins were in a short time comfortably settled and dressed for dinner. Lady Beauclark came down in her satin and lace, looking as if she had never wept so sore in the shrubbery or anywhere else, and welcoming them all with smiles that must have done the west-countrymen good. Sir Edward came down also, in his quiet gentlemanly trim. I suppose they had their usual affectionate meeting up-stairs, but I didn't see it. The cook did her duty; I did mine; and by the time the dessert was set on the table, one couldn't have wished

to see a pleasant family-party. Sir Edward had got over the hunts and the parliament, and was making himself agreeable about old times and people in Cornwall; Lady Beauclark was agreeable without effort—you wouldn't have supposed she was the woman who took the key out of my fingers not three hours before; Master Philip was prattling away to his cousins, as he called them; and the west-country gentlemen were doing more than common justice to the wine. It's my opinion, that the people from that quarter have a particular knowledge of good port. The cousins had got through all I had put on the table or the sideboard; and a kindly old maiden lady was treating Master Philip to the last drop in her glass, when his father desired me to bring up another bottle, and his mother reminded the child that port was too strong for little boys.

'Oh,' cried the spoiled urchin, 'I know very well why you don't want Glassford to go to the cellar for more wine; it's because you have somebody locked up there; I saw it all at the top of the stair before you saw me.'

'What fancies that child takes in his head,' said Lady Beauclark, endeavouring to laugh; but she turned first fiery red and then ghastly pale, and I saw two or three sly old gentlemen exchange knowing looks.

'You'll find the best port in the left-hand bin; bring us that,' said Sir Edward, appearing to take no notice of what his son had said; but, as I shut the door, I heard him say: 'Confound it! I have named the wrong bin, and those fellows are so stupid;' and before I had got half-way down the stair, he was at my heels. 'Give me the key, Glassford,' he said. I knew then that he had heard the child's words, and what notion they put in his mind, for his teeth were set, and his look was as black as a thunder-cloud. May be it was a simple action, but I was young; and with a full intention of serving my Lady, I plucked up courage to say: 'Indeed, Sir Edward, there is nobody there but an old woman.'

'Give me the key,' he said, clutching it and the light from me at once: the next moment he had turned the lock, and stepped into the cellar. It was a well-arranged and particularly open one; there was not a corner in which anything but a rat could hide, except at the further end, between two great pipes of claret: straight to that spot Sir Edward walked; I followed, as bold as brass, thinking how disappointed he would be. The old woman was wedged between the two pipes; he seized her by the shoulder, and with one powerful twist, turned her round to face the light; but when it fell on her, I thought my master was going mad, there was such wild horror in his look; and with something between a curse and a cry, he rushed out of the cellar, driving me before him, locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and bounded up the stair. I heard him go into the library, and lock the door on himself; and at the same time a tremendous ringing of bells, mingled with calls and cries, came from the dining-room. I was there in an instant, and so were most of the servants. Lady Beauclark had dropped from her chair in a fainting-fit, they said, while relating an anecdote of her travels on the continent, and one of the sly old gentlemen was supporting her in his arms, but she looked so like death that we all thought she was gone.

They carried her to her own room. The footman took horse, and rode for the nearest doctor, who lived in Farnham; but before he came, her Ladyship had revived—said she had not been strong of late—she believed it was the weather—she hoped her dear cousins would excuse her, and she would be quite well next day. The doctor saw her, and said he would send a mixture; he also saw Sir Edward, who came out of the library just in time, and assured him that his Lady was in no danger. Many a time, in the

course of my removing cloths and changing plates and dishes, I've had occasion to admire the powers of gentlefolks for making-believe and putting-on. Sir Edward Beauclark spoke to the doctor like a man greatly concerned and surprised at his Lady's sudden fit, but quite satisfied with the medical man's assurance that all would be well; then he went back to his west-country cousins with many apologies because he had made a mistake, and there was no more port in the cellar—the somebody whom Philip had seen locked up there must have drunk it all; and he and the gentlemen made merry over that joke and the rest of the wine for some time after, the child being taken up-stairs crying for his mamma.

That was the longest evening I remember: how long it must have been to the old soul locked up in the cellar! If Sir Edward had sent me for any more wine, I would have smuggled her out, for my Lady's sake, but he took care not to do so. The long evening came to an end at last—the Cornish cousins retired to their rooms; the tired servants got to bed. I had gathered all the plate, and brought it safe to my own pantry, feeling rather nervous, partly on account of what had happened, partly on account of the strange servants some of the cousins had brought with them. But when I was fairly in my own room, it struck me that one of a pair of silver goblets, parcel-gilt and beautifully chased, which Sir Edward had bought in Italy, and valued highly, had been used at table, and not brought down with the rest. I could not go to sleep without knowing exactly where that goblet was. All the house was silent, and all the lights were out, at least I thought so; but taking my candle in my hand, I slipped off my shoes, and stole up-stairs, to satisfy myself if it had been left in the dining-room. I was going to turn the handle of the door, when I noticed that it was not quite shut; the lock was in the habit of loosing, you see, and I would have pushed it wide open but for a gleam of light which flashed on me from within. While all the great house, guests and servants, had gone to rest, there were two in that large, richly furnished, and deserted room, with one candle nearly burned down, but just bright enough to shew me that the one was Sir Edward, and the other Lady Beauclark. If I had lost my place for it the next moment, I could not have gone back to my room without knowing something of what they had in hand; but I held my breath hard, and shaded my candle in the corner. Sir Edward was standing in the middle of the room, and his face was working strangely; my Lady was sitting on a chair against the wall, with a night-wrapper about her, which did not cover her bare white feet, her head bowed, and her face half-hidden by the fall of her beautiful hair. She was speaking in a low but clear tone—in the deep silence of the house, I could hear every word.

'I know what she did to you and yours; but she is my mother, and your son's grandmother. For his sake, let her go. If I could have kept her away from your house, I would have done it; but I will swear to you she will never come back.'

'Why didn't you tell me what sort of a mother you had in time?' said Sir Edward, speaking low too, but it was as if his passion choked him.

'I didn't know it till the very last, and then I was afraid you would not marry me; but if I had known all that was to come'—and my Lady raised her head, and looked at him calmly and coldly—'I should not have told you that which would bring my mother to the gallows. But, Sir Edward, I would never have married you.'

Sir Edward stepped back—I think it was in pure astonishment; but the next moment he had recovered himself, and his anger took the hard cold turn it is apt to take in such men. 'We are unmarried from this day. But there is the cellar-key,' he said, flinging it on the table. 'Get her out of my house as fast

as you can; let her keep out of my sight at her peril; and for yourself, remember, that though you are Lady Beauchamp to the rest of the world, you are in future no wife to me.' And Sir Edward dashed out of the room at such a rate, that he went straight over me, candle and all. I don't know who he thought it was, but I heard him swearing about the devil and eavesdroppers as he went stumbling up-stairs, and I suppose Providence kept him from breaking his neck in the dark. Before I could get myself gathered up, Lady Beauchamp came out with a light in one hand, and the cellar-key in the other. Oh, but her face was fixed and marble-like!

'I came to look after one of the chased goblets, my Lady,' was all I could stammer out.

'It is on the sideboard, Glassford; but never mind it,' she said. 'I know you are too discreet a man to talk of family matters, and I want you to get ready, and take a person and a message from me to Johnson the gamekeeper's cottage.'

'I'll be ready in a minute, my Lady.'

'Very well. Come and tap at your own pantry-door when you are prepared to go;' and she passed down my little stair, and made straight for the cellar.

I don't know what passed between her and the old woman, while I got on my water-proofs, and made ready my lantern, for it was just as dark and damp a night as ever a man turned out in to traverse a solitary park; but when I knocked at the pantry-door, they came out together. 'Give this to Johnson from me,' said Lady Beauchamp, putting a sealed note into my hand; and I knew there was money in it. 'Now, good-night;' and she kissed the old woman, unlocked the back-door for us with her own fair hands, and told me she would sit up to open it when I came back.

It was a weary trudge I had through the park with that old woman. She never spoke a word to me, but muttered a good deal to herself, and kept leaping back from every branch or weed she saw waving in the wind, with a smothered cry about somebody coming from the Ashcliff rocks. It was a mighty business to get Johnson woke up; and his wife made the wood ring with her cries of thieves and murder; but at last they understood who was knocking at their door. Neither of them looked over-pleased when they saw the old woman; but the contents of my Lady's note made all right; and Johnson bade me tell her he would obey her commands. I walked back to the Hall, feeling wonderfully relieved; and there was Lady Beauchamp, with no more clothes on in that cold night than before, waiting for me at the open door.

Sir Edward and she did not go to church together next morning: it was said they slept too late. But the Hall was decorated with the Christmas holly; we hung the mistletoe in its usual place, but only the down-stairs people took notice of it. There was not a better Christmas-dinner in any house in the county; and everything went on smoothly and merrily. A keen observer might have noted that Sir Edward and his Lady never exchanged a word if they could help it; and he was rather brief in returning thanks when the company drank their health, and wished them many a happy Christmas; but only the pair, myself, and Johnson, knew what had been locked up in the wine-cellar. The Cornish cousins remained innocent to the last: they made out their visit, pressed days and all; said they enjoyed themselves very much, as I honestly believe they did; and went home to Cornwall with strong invitations to Sir Edward and his Lady to come and spend Easter among them; which both promised to do.

As soon as they were gone, Sir Edward's valet packed up his master's things, and master and man set off to London—never to come back. From that time, Sir Edward lived partly at the Club, partly in the House of Commons, and partly on the

continent. His Lady heard from him through his solicitor. I believe she got a pretty fair allowance out of his income, as she kept Heath Hall in a quiet, respectable way, and did a deal of charity. When all was settled, Johnson was one day told in a public manner to bring her Ladyship's faithful old nurse, Mrs Wilson, from the poor street where she lived in London home to the Hall; for the good woman should be taken care of for the rest of her days. In proper time, Mrs Wilson was brought accordingly, and comfortably lodged and provided for in two good but out-of-the-way rooms up-stairs, where my Lady often went to sit with her, and read the Bible. All the servants thought Mrs Wilson a very odd person: she seldom came out of her rooms, looked frightened if she saw a stranger, and had a habit of talking to herself about somebody falling down the rock, and that she didn't do it. I knew her to be the same old woman who had crept through the shrubbery, and been locked up in the cellar. I don't know what Master Philip would have made out on the subject; but directly after she came, one of his father's cousins, who had looked knowing on Christmas-eve, took the boy away on a visit to Cornwall, and he never came back to the Hall in my time. His childish tongue cost his mother dear. I think his being taken from her was the heaviest part of it. But the absence of husband and son was soon noticed by the county families; the Christmas-eve story got wind, and didn't get less: what Sir Edward thought when he followed me down to the cellar, was the only meaning people could give to such appearances; and the ladies, who had always hated my Lady for being handsome, voted her a very improper person, and not to be visited.

Poor Lady Beauchamp was not long a mark for their gossip or censure; while Sir Edward was getting through his third session in parliament, she sickened of what we thought a severe cold, but the doctor found out that it was a rapid consumption; and though her husband was written to in good time, he came only to attend her funeral in very deep mourning. The week after, his man of business paid off and discharged all the servants but myself. They wanted me to stay, on account of what I knew, you see; but I could afford to go, through the legacy her poor Ladyship left me, and I declined the offer—genteelly, of course. They never thought of asking Johnson to stay, though he had got a legacy too, and earned it better than myself; but stay he did, through the favour of the man of business. And when they got Mrs Wilson conveyed to the County Lunatic Asylum, he said the poor woman was undoubtedly mad, for he heard her crying out that the late Lady Beauchamp was her daughter. Johnson was gamekeeper for many a year after, when Heath Hall was inhabited again, and Sir Edward brought home his second wife, Lord Hampshire's niece, and one of the plainest women in the county. He caught a Tartar that time, I am happy to say. May be it's not right, but, for my Lady's sake, I can't help it. She spent beyond counting; she affronted all his cousins; she threw his mother's picture out of the dining-room; and made Heath Hall so hot for him, that he used to flee for refuge to the old place in Cornwall; and he died there at last.—Dear me, how one generation goes, and another comes on! Master Philip is Sir Philip now, and brought home a bride nearly as handsome as his mother last Christmas. But I hope he will never happen to think as his father did, through his chattering, that she has somebody locked up in the wine-cellar.

As the butler finished his narration, the great clock upon the mantelpiece struck eleven.

'We have only an hour more,' said Tom; 'please to pass round the punch a little quicker; Mrs

Antray here has got a story to tell us, and would like to wet her lips.

'Lor, sir, I wasn't thinking of no such thing,' observed that lady, turning from peony to down-right carnation.

'But you *have* got a story; come, you can't deny it, cook,' observed my neighbour the upper-nurse; 'you allus threaten to tell it us, you know you do, when we come into your kitchen without your special asking.'

'Yes; I never like to see *any* folks who have no business there,' answered Mrs Antray, with just the least toss of her splendid cap, 'but more especially Ladies (which I am sure my mistress here never comes), except at proper times and seasons. It's not genteel, although some does it as thinks themselves so; and besides, I have a good reason for my dislike, through an affair that happened to me many years ago in the city of York, and I shouldn't care to tell it (notwithstanding what Mrs Peach says), except to discreet people and old friends, such as I see here.'

THE COOK'S STORY.

I HAD been eighteen months with a highly respectable family in Scarborough: they had come from India for their health, and had to go back again, because the master held a high place there—I think they called it in the Civil Service. They didn't want to take their English servants with them, and if they had, I shouldn't have cared to go out among 'eathens and 'eat all the way to Calcuttar, where I'm told they keep the fans going in every house, as if they were winnowing wheat. Anyhow, we had all got our warnings, and were on the look-out for situations; and the missus being an uncommon nice lady, and very friendly to me, busied herself to get me one before she went away. But situations were remarkably scarce in Scarborough at the time, on account that it was winter, which is always dull in watering-places; and after trying for three or four to no purpose, I got quite down-hearted; when one day, after a visitor had called, the missus said to me: 'Martha, I have heard of something which might suit you in York, if you don't think it too far or strange for you. There is a lady, Mrs Waters—I don't know her myself, but my friend who called to-day is acquainted with her—and she wants a cook. There are three servants kept besides. The house is very genteel, though it is situated in North Street, one of the oldest parts of the town. The wages is good; and the work can't be too much, for Mrs Waters is a widow, with no family but a daughter, who is always at school, and a female friend—I think a relation—who lives with her as a boarder. If you take my advice, Martha, you will apply to Mrs Waters, and I'll give you a letter of recommendation. She is fond of taking servants on trial; and lest you should find the house dull, or the distance from your friends too great, I advise you to agree for a month only, in the first instance.'

I thought the advice a good one, and took it accordingly. Mrs Waters did appear to be in want of a cook, for she took me at my word; and I agreed to go on trial for a month, to begin from the following Wednesday.

I was making my preparations for the new place before I moved from the old one—the great friendliness of my missus made it easy to do anything of the kind—when Hester Hicks, a steady, respectable woman, who did everything else could get to do about genteel houses, from monthly nursing to helping at

parties, came to do plain needle-work for the children, and assist in the packing-up. Hester was a good many years older than myself, and was thought to know a good deal of the world, bein' about all sorta of ladies ever since her husband, poor man, married another wife at Derby, and got transported for it; and as she had shewn herself quite a friend of mine, I told her when and where I was going, and asked if she had any knowledge of the place or the lady.

'There's two of them,' said Hester—'Mrs Samuel and Mrs Simon Waters. The ladies were no relations, that ever I heard of; but they married two brothers who were in partnership, and did a remarkable business as manufacturing chemists in Norwich. I believe Mr Samuel Waters was the eldest, but they kept up the two names for distinction's sake. Mrs Samuel has one daughter: they say she thinks the sun sets and rises in her. Mrs Simon never had any children; and by all accounts, the ladies and their husbands didn't agree too well. There was nothing just public of the disturbance kind; but the marriages were not happy ones; howsoever, Mrs Samuel and Mrs Simon agreed between themselves wonderfully, considering that they were sisters-in-law: there never were such friends; nobody ever heard a disputing word or a sharp remark made on either side; the one always knowed the other's affairs, and kept them as close as her own. They are both widows these many years; and in some respects have been surprisingly lucky, though their luck didn't just come in a way every one would like.'

'What way did it come, Mrs Hicks?' said I, being rather curious, and we were alone in the kitchen.

'Well, it was entirely by deaths,' said she. 'First, Mr Samuel dropped off just after he had insured his life for two thousand pounds, which came to her of course. Then Mrs Simon's poor man went after he had failed in business, and met with an accident, which the doctors said would have made him a cripple for life. Next, Mrs Samuel's old aunt, who owned the house in North Street, and all the good old-fashioned furniture that's in it, took a sudden sickness one Christmas-time that the two widows were spending with her, and died before she could make a will, which, poor lady, she had talked of for a dozen years and more, in favour of a maid who had lived with her goodness knows how long, and hadn't no paradise of it, I'll be bound; and Mrs Samuel being next of kin, came in for everything. Then she took Mrs Simon to live with her, for the old friendship's sake, I suppose. It's a fine large house, as you'll see, Martha, with room enough for them both; and it must have been a great matter for Mrs Simon to get free quarters, as, through the failure of business and her husband's accident, she had little enough to come and go upon; but there was a windfall for her at last that Mrs Samuel never got the like of. Her poor husband had an uncle in India: a wonderful old man he was, I'm told, and had never married, but stayed in that hot country making money and saving it from his youth up. Once he came home to England on some business: his nephews were new married at the time; and when he visited them, Mrs Samuel either gave him some offence, or he took it; so, when the old gentleman died in India two years ago, he left the great fortune he had gathered—above fifty thousand pounds, they say—to Mrs Simon in the first place, and after her, to Mrs Samuel's daughter, but not a penny to Mrs Samuel herself. It's on that money they keep the house in such grand style, for Mrs Simon lives on there, and pays a great board, though it's said she's growing more stingy every day since she got the riches; and Mrs Samuel has a deal of humouring to do. In short, it's my opinion, Martha, that you'll have more than one mistress; but anything can be put up with for a month or so.'

I was much of Hester's mind; and went to York two days after, with no great expectations of a long stay. Yet, when the coach—which was the way of travelling then—set me and my boxes down at Mrs Waters' door in North Street, I was quite cheered up at the sight of the house, it looked so comfortable and home-like, though a little old-fashioned. Everything was in the best repair. Bright fires were shining through every window out upon the winter evening; and the situation was uncommon cheerful, being just overagainst the ferry, with people of all kinds coming and going. The inside was just as pleasant as the outside look: one couldn't have desired a better kitchen, and the range was perfectly delightful. There were three servants there besides myself—a housemaid, a parlour-maid, and a boy in buttons. As soon as I came, they told me to go up-stairs, for the ladies wanted to see me; so up I went, and into the drawing-room. It was very handsomely furnished, but in an old-fashioned way; and there were two ladies sitting on easy-chairs, one on each side of the fire. They were both dressed in black, and had French caps on, being quite middle-aged. There was no likeness between them, such as one sees in relations; but they were both the same kind of women, tall and rather thin, but not slender, with a great look of bones about them; dull dark hair, turning fast to gray, and pale sallow complexions. They spoke to me in a quiet ladylike manner; yet at that first sight I didn't like their eyes, they looked so hard and keen. But there was sitting in the corner of the room farthest from them, and turning over a picture-book, such a sweet, good-looking girl, not come to woman's time, but likely to have beaux enough when she did; and I was fairly wonder-struck when one of the ladies (by the by, she had the longest nose) called that sweet girl her daughter Sophia.

The long-nosed lady was Mrs Samuel Waters; and the other—I must tell you she wore a diamond ring, and asked by a long way the most questions—was Mrs Simon Waters. But before I left the room, it was clear to me that, as Hester Hicks prophesied, I had more than one mistress. However, they appeared to be satisfied with my looks and my answers: told me a good deal about the orderliness and respectability of their house, the number that had applied for the situation, and how particular they were as to character and conduct; that their servants were never kept up late, and allowed to go to church regularly on Sundays, but got no holidays, except once a quarter; that the cook's place was the easiest and best in the house, and I might be years with them in case I suited; and when they were done, I went down-stairs.

I must say it was not a bad place nor a hard one. They saw little company, having but few acquaintances; two or three ladies dropping in to tea and supper now and then, and a small party at times, was the whole of it. Mrs Samuel looked after the house-keeping. Keen and careful enough she was, but managed it all like a lady. Mrs Simon did the fault-finding. It was not easy to please her in the cooking of expensive things, which she got for herself in such very small quantities as one could scarcely see, let alone taste; and the parlour-maid told me that she finished up every meal with a lecture on extravagance, beginning with Mrs Samuel and Miss Sophia, and ending with the world in general. The mother and daughter had a wonderful life of listening to her about every ribbon and handkerchief they got, and every fly that was hired to take or fetch them; but Mrs Samuel put up with it, she said, because they were old friends, and Mrs Simon was the noblest soul that breathed; but we servants knew of course it was on account of the great board which enabled her to keep the genteel establishment she did. Miss Sophia was soon to go back to the boarding-school in

Scarborough. It was her vacation-time when I came; and she was not to be more than three weeks at home afterwards; but young lady as she was, I knew I should miss her, and so would everybody about the house. Her fair, pleasant face, her kindly, cheerful ways, were a pleasure to see in the precise, sober, dry life we had, with everything going like clockwork under Mrs Samuel's management, and Mrs Simon's fault-finding keeping chime to it.

The chime was stopped for a little by an accident that happened to the good lady one morning, when my trial-month was drawing to an end, and I was making up my mind, upon the whole, to stay, supposing I was asked. Mrs Simon was coming down-stairs in a great hurry, because she was ten minutes too late for breakfast, which by her special orders had to be on the table at half-past seven summer and winter, when she missed her foot, and fell down a whole flight into the hall below. It would have killed anybody else; but Mrs Simon had a hard hold of life, like most people who have money, and friends waiting for it. She got up before Mrs Samuel could come to her help—and she was the nearest—went groaning into the breakfast-parlour, and ordered the boy in buttons to run for the doctor. 'Mind,' said she, 'it's Dr Hinderwell I want: he's dreadful expensive, but none of them has such skill; and either my heart or some of my bones is broken, I am sure.' Oh, didn't Mrs Samuel make a mighty lamentation about her dear darling friend. Being young at the time, I would have believed some of it, if she hadn't held on so long; but when Dr Hinderwell came, she had to give up, for he said Mrs Simon had got two ribs broken, and must go to bed, and be kept quiet; but we should all be thankful, as, considering the fall, her escape with life was next to a miracle.

'This is a nice business for me,' said the parlour-maid, when we got down-stairs by ourselves again. 'If I had known she was going to fall, I would have given warning last month. You see, Martha, she keeps no maid of her own, through downright stinginess; and when anything keeps her in her room, I get the job of waiting on her, and a precious job it is, between her temper and her saving; and they'll expect me to give up my holiday that is to be next Monday, and my cousin Thomas John come home from sea. I'll give up their dirty place first—that is, if you won't stand my friend, and I know you were good-natured from the first minute I saw your face, Martha. Mrs Simon don't like the housemaid, because she falls asleep in the very middle of her lectures; but I know she likes you; and if you would take the waiting on Monday in my place, I am sure Mrs Samuel would agree to it, and let them all eat a cold dinner for once. You know, Martha, I would do as much for you some other time.'

'I have no objections, Susan,' said I: 'people in the same house ought to help each other, especially when holidays is in question. I'll stand Mrs Simon for one Monday, if anybody minds the cooking, or, for that matter, I'll stay in, and cook double the Sunday before.'

Susan thanked me for my kindness. She was a genteel girl, I must say, but a little sharp in the tongue; and she didn't wait long to tell Mrs Samuel, and get her consent. I thought there was some great dinner to be cooked when the good lady sent for me to come up to the drawing-room the same afternoon; but it was only to tell me what great confidence she placed in me, and what an honour it was to be allowed to wait on Mrs Simon.

'Martha,' said she, 'if it was not that I am so occupied in getting ready Sophia's things, because the dear child must go back to school on Tuesday next, nobody but myself should wait on my beloved friend. Mrs Simon has been more than a sister to me for many years; she has the kindest, noblest, most

affectionate heart—just a little odd at times, and apt to take whimsical notions; you will see that for yourself, Martha; I know you have sense enough. But what does it signify? We have all our faults; and under the circumstances, my precious friend must be particularly studied. If there be any little thing that might disturb her, you will just take care not to mention it, Martha; Susan always did so, by my directions; and if you do the same, your care and attention shall not go unrewarded.'

I remembered afterwards that Mrs Samuel looked very keenly at me as she spoke the last words; and when I told Susan down-stairs what she said about waiting on the invalid herself, the parlour-maid whispered to me: 'No danger of her. Mrs Simon will never let her stay a minute in the room, if she can help it; and you will have to make ready everything she takes on Monday, for not a cup of tea will she let Mrs Samuel pour out for her.'

'That must be part of the whimsical notions,' thinks I to myself; but I didn't say it, knowing it was always wise to keep in what one hears of one's betters. Howsoever, Monday came, and Susan went on her holiday. I made myself as clean as a new pin, and marched up-stairs to wait on Mrs Simon. She had the best bedroom in the house; a large and uncommon comfortable one it was, with a beautiful view of old North Street, where everything looked as ancient as the hills; one of the city gates of York, which was rather in a coming-down state; not to speak of the ferry, and passengers going to and fro from morning till night.

The doctor said Mrs Simon was getting better, but it would be a long case. Poor lady, her night-cap did not improve her large bony face; and I think the accident and illness had rather sharpened her powers of fault-finding, for she never ceased at all; and if all the sick ladies take such a stock of waiting on, I had rather not belong to the nursing profession. I had cooking as well as nursing to do for Mrs Simon. It was perhaps to keep the time from hanging heavy on her hands, that she wanted so many things in the eating and drinking line. All day long, I was going like the ferry-boat between her room and the kitchen, preparing one mess or another that was good for broken ribs—at least Mrs Simon said so, and I must say her invention was wonderful. All the while she was having them, it was her pleasure to discourse about the wickedness of the world, and warn me against it, till I couldn't help thinking that the good lady had somehow or other met with all the rogues and villains in creation. Mrs Samuel came up to inquire how she felt at least every hour; they called each other dear and darling; but it was plain to me that Mrs Simon did not want her friend to stay in the room. Miss Sophia came up two or three times, and she would have been welcome enough to stay, but the young girl didn't care to do it, and had a good excuse in preparing for her school, to which she had to go back next day.

Well, that remarkable Monday wore away, as the most uncommon of days will; Mrs Simon's business with the plates and forks, basins and spoons, slackened off a little in the afternoon, and she chose to take a sleep; but at different times that day she had been talking of almond-meal gruel—it had come into fashion, it seems, in first-class sick-rooms. Dr Hinderwell had told her all about it; she had sent Susan to the shop he recommended for the meal, and kept it in her own room cupboard, because the new-fashioned thing was dear. Now, Mrs Simon made up her mind to have the gruel at last; and before she fell asleep, left strict orders for me to make it ready against her waking up, which was to be in an hour and a half at furthest. I went down-stairs with the packet of meal in my hand, and something like fear and trembling in my heart; I didn't well understand the new invention, but it don't do for a professed cook to say

she can't do anything. It was getting late in the winter-day—by the by, it was a quiet wet one. The housemaid had got leave to go and see her sick brother, who lived over the river; the boy in buttons had been sent to secure Miss Sophia's seat in the Scarborough coach next morning; and Susan being gone, I was by myself in the kitchen, when I stepped Mrs Samuel. Her first words to me were quite familiar and confidential; she inquired how Mrs Simon and I had got on; asked me if I didn't find her full of whims; and if I wasn't tired and stifled with staying so long in the sick-room.

'You look pale and fagged, Martha,' she said; 'a breath of air would do you good. The rain is over; just take a turn down to the ferry.—What's this you're going to make for her?' and she glanced at the packet in my hands. 'Oh, almond-meal gruel. I can make that as well as you, and maybe better. I had great experience in it when poor Mr Samuel was ill. He would take nothing that was made by any hand but mine;' and Mrs Samuel sighed deeply, and wiped her eyes, though there was no trace of tears in them. I was glad to get a breath of fresh air, and still more glad to get off with the gruel business; so I thanked the good lady, put the packet into her hands, put on my own old bonnet and shawl, and walked away down to the ferry.

I didn't stay long, for another shower came on; but when I got back to the kitchen, Mrs Samuel had the gruel ready. 'It's the nicest in the world,' said she. 'I have tasted it, and I know it is just to her liking; so take it up at once. Her bell has rung, and the dear soul will be waiting for it.—But, Martha, take my advice, and don't say I made the gruel. Dear Mrs Simon has so many whims, she would think you were careless of her if she heard of anybody making it but yourself; and you know she is well able to reward your care when her health is restored. Providence grant that it may be soon.'

I found Mrs Simon prepared to be in very bad temper; but she brightened up at the sight of the gruel, and made me set it on a little table close by her bedside, while she sat up in a sort of state propped by pillows. I lighted the wax-candles which she allowed for her own room, drew the crimson curtains, and poked up the fire till the place looked very bright and comfortable. I can see it now in my mind's eye from the spot where I sat down, nearly opposite the dressing-table, which had very handsome toilet things and a particularly fine looking-glass upon it. Mrs Simon had fallen to the gruel with great relish. I couldn't help noticing how quickly she got through it, and was just going to ask if it was to her liking, when all at once she laid down the spoon, and said to me in a voice that made me start, it was so low and hollow: 'Martha, did you make this gruel yourself?'

I was going to say I did, as Mrs Samuel had advised me, when she added, in the same low and hollow tone: 'Tell me the truth, Martha.' My honest father and mother had taught me to speak the truth at all hazards, far away in my native village beside the Wye, and I directly answered: 'I did not, mum. Mrs Samuel was kind enough to make it for me, while I went out to take the air for a minute.' I jumped from my chair at the last word, for Mrs Simon's face had turned whiter than the pillows about her; but the next moment it turned perfectly black, with a scowl of rage and hatred that would have made me run out of the room if it had lasted; but it did not. Mrs Simon sat for a minute, as if trying to compose herself; and when I ventured to say: 'I hope there is nothing wrong with the gruel, mum,' she said, in a kind of a mocking way: 'O no, nothing, of course;' then bowed her head over the table, and sat looking into the basin, as if she expected to see a serpent or something wonderful at the bottom of it. I didn't know what to make of the

matter, except that Mrs Simon was going out of her mind. I would have given a quarter's wages to see any of the house-people, but I daren't go down to speak to them for fear of what she might do; when, to my great comfort, I heard Miss Sophia's light step coming up the stair, and the next minute the good and pretty girl was in the room. She had been out to tea with a young companion, and was going, as I have said, back to school by the Scarborough coach next morning. But the coach started very early, and Miss Sophia, like most young people, could do a deal of sleeping; so she had to go to bed early too; and before going, came to take leave of Mrs Simon, who could not be disturbed in the morning with bidding her good-bye.

It's my belief that Mrs Simon expected her. She was always kind to the girl, in her own fault-finding way; and in my simplicity, I was glad to see that she seemed to become herself again at the sight of Miss Sophia, and welcomed and made much of her at an uncommon rate. 'Going back to school to-morrow,' she said. 'How I will miss you, my darling girl. And you have come to bid me good-bye. Well, Sophia, you have come in time to get share of my almond-meal gruel. It is quite a treat, and I know you have never tasted it. Bring a chair, and sit down at the table, my child.'

Sophia tried to excuse herself. The healthy young girl did not care for the mess; but no excuse would serve with Mrs Simon, and Sophia would not offend her. She drew a chair to the little table, set herself down, and began to stir the gruel, praising its colour, and telling Mrs Simon what a pity it was to deprive herself of it.

'Not a bit, my darling; I have taken half the basinful. Take you the rest, just to please me—I know it will do you good.'

Mrs Simon turned away her face as she spoke. Miss Sophia did not see it, and was lifting a spoonful to her lips; but I saw it plain enough in that fine large looking-glass, and if evil spirits ever get joyful, their looks must be something like it. At the sight, a sudden thought struck me like cold steel—nothing but Providence could have put it in my mind—and scarcely knowing what I did, I made a rush at the little table, overturned it, basin, gruel, and all, on the top of Miss Sophia; and she, thinking I had gone mad, gave a loud scream, and ran out of the room. Mrs Samuel flew up-stairs at her daughter's cry. 'Has Sophia taken any of that?' she cried, clutching me by the arm, and pointing to the spilt mess. I had no time to answer, for Mrs Simon was out of the bed, and upon her sister-in-law tooth and nail. I couldn't have interferred between them to save my own life; but Mrs Samuel escaped, leaving her a handful of hair, and where she took refuge I don't know. Mrs Simon rushed after her down the first flight of stairs without saying a word, and fell on the lobby in a convulsive fit that was terrible to see. Susan, the housemaid, and the boy, had all fortunately got back by this time; I called them up, and with great difficulty we got Mrs Simon back to her bed. Miss Sophia helped us with all her might; and Mrs Samuel gave orders, but she never put to her hand, or came within reach of the convulsed woman; and it wasn't till everything was cleared up and settled that she would let anybody go for Dr Hinderwell.

At last he was sent for, and came. Mrs Simon had grown quieter, but her face was the colour of lead, her eyes were closed, and her breathing was hard and quick. Mrs Samuel told the doctor a good deal about the peculiarities of her constitution. He said her nervous system must have received a shock in the fall—of course he meant the first one, when her ribs were broken, for nobody told him of the second. Then he tried to bleed her, but no blood would come; and

a messenger from Lady Hartford came post-haste for him; and he said he would call again about twelve. Before twelve o'clock that night, which I hear learned people call the morning, Mrs Simon was gone beyond the reach of doctors. She never opened her eyes, nor moved much after the first fit, but her breathing grew harder and shorter, and at last ceased altogether. Mrs Samuel sat by the bed the whole time; and when all was over, her lamentations were loud enough to alarm the neighbourhood. When Dr Hinderwell came, he appeared surprised and shocked to hear that his patient was gone; but after talking with Mrs Samuel for a while in a room by themselves, he said the death was a natural one, and in his opinion there was no necessity for an inquest. The doctor was always inclined to save families trouble in that way, and some thought it was a great help to the paying practice he had.

I had my own thoughts of all that had happened, but I made up my mind to keep them to myself; for, though innocent enough, my hand had been in the business; and towards daybreak, when the house had settled down in the manner of houses that death has come into, and those that could rest were getting some sleep, I was in my own room packing up, with a strong belief that Mrs Samuel Waters' dwelling was no safe place, when my door opened, and in walked Mrs Samuel with a bank-note in her hand.

'It's for you,' said she, holding it up, but speaking low.

'I won't touch it, mum,' said I, putting my hands behind me.

'It's twenty pounds, Martha; and she held it nearly under my nose.

'If it was a thousand, mum,' said I, 'it shouldn't come among my honest things. All I want is to go away quietly with my boxes; and you and I both know that the less said is the soonest mended.'

She never said a word, but put the note into her pocket, and walked out of the room. I packed till daylight came, then I went out and got a porter to take my boxes. The rest of the servants couldn't make out why I wouldn't stay for breakfast, but I knew better. Mrs Samuel sent me my month's wages by the boy in buttons, and Miss Sophia bade me a kindly good-bye. Good girl; it was never known to her what she had escaped by my mad rush at that little table, or how she came to inherit so early that great fortune gathered in India. She is married to a London merchant this many a year; and Mrs Samuel is gone the way she sent others. She was counted rich and respectable for many a long day in York; but the servants said she had very suspicious ways regarding anything that was made for her to eat or drink, and didn't rest well in her bed at nights. So there's my reason for never liking to see ladies coming into kitchens.

Here the clock struck twelve: the signal for the breaking up of our pleasant party. But we did not separate until—all glasses once more filled—Christmas good-wishes had been interchanged from High to Low, from Low to High. I think we were all the better for that meeting, and the stories told at it. The Common Human Experience of which they were the evidence seemed to draw together Master, and Guest, and Servant; and henceforth, I trust to feel a greater sympathy than before with all UNDER ONE ROOF.

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